New Testament
Toaru Majutsu no Index 2

On November 5th, Kamijou Touma, Accelerator, and Hamazura Shiage finally met in Academy City. However, they must now settle things with their respective girls who were worried about them and want to know what they have been doing.

Kamijou calls out to Mikoto in oddly high spirits while she is feeling depressed and gripping the Gekota strap that acted as a memento. He then sees a Railgun hell. And then he calls out to Index in the same high spirits...

Hamazura is finally found by Mugino and the others who are continuing their "the loser with be a humiliating bunny" game. However, a girl next to him is the spitting image of the late former member of Item, Frenda...

Accelerator is fed up with Last Order and Misaka Worst as they enter uninvited. But when the usually mischievous Misaka Worst behaves herself before Kamijou, it pisses him off for some reason...

When science and magic cross paths, the everyday life comedy part begins!

か-12-30

新約 とある魔術の禁書目録（インデックス）②

鎌池和馬

電撃文庫

¥510

9784048707381

1920193005103

ISBN978-4-04-870738-1
C0193 ¥510E

ASCII MEDIA WORKS

Published by ASCII Media Works

Recommended Retail Price: 510 JPY

*Consumption levy will be added to the price separately

Kamachi Kazuma

It may be a bit unclear, but this is a zoomed-in photo of a partially clouded sky. But in this season, this isn't too bad, don't you think? This cloudy sky keeps it from being too hot and it does not produce rain, so it may be quite a valuable thing.

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Toaru Majutsu no Index 1~22
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Heavy Object
Heavy Object: Adoption War
Heavy Object: Shadow of the Giants

Illustrator: Haimura Kiyotaka

I'm originally from Onomichi City of Hiroshima Prefecture. Now I live in a certain area of Kantou living a half hikikomori life while drawing illustrations.

カバー／暁印刷

"T-Touma!! You were gone this whole time, so I was worried! Just what are you doing!?"
Anglican Church nun and keeper of the Index of Prohibited Books
Index
新約
とある魔術の禁書目録
インデックス
2
鎌池和馬
イラスト/
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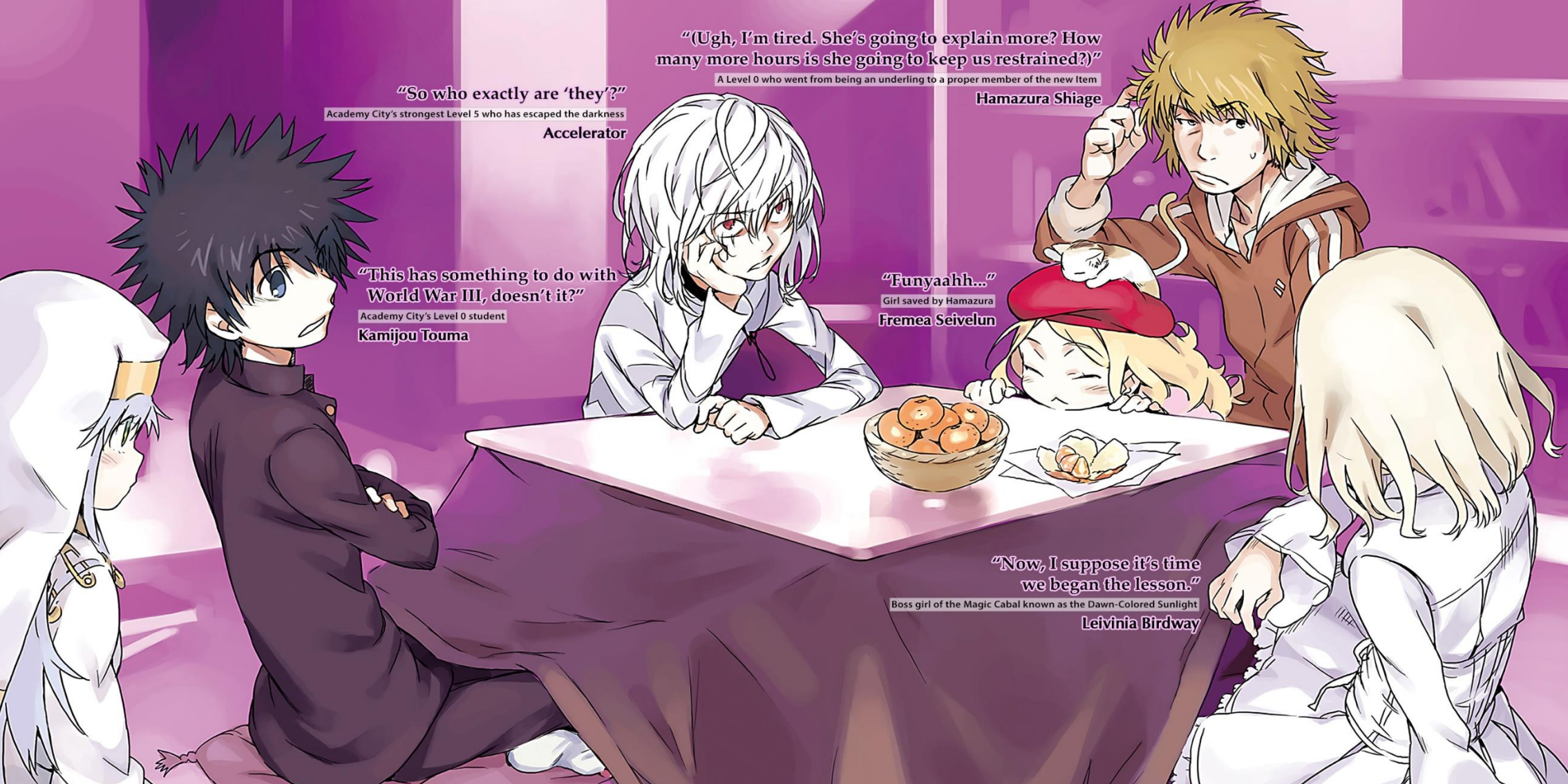
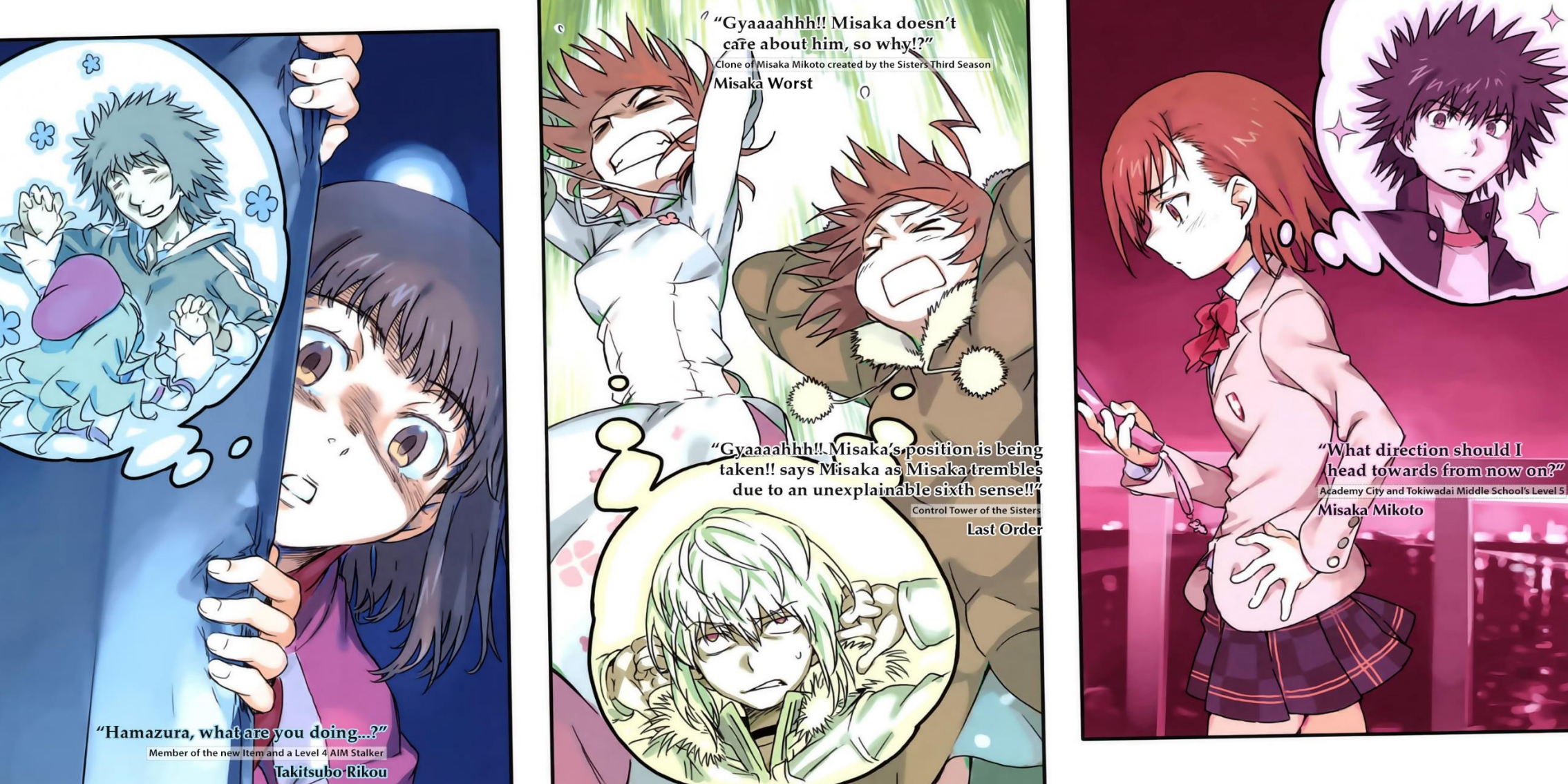
"Something my sister doesn't like? I guess that would be panties with a large rabbit on them or anything spicy."

Little sister of the boss of a certain magic cabal

Patricia Birdway

Designed by Hirokazu Watanabe(2725 Inc.)


"So who exactly are 'they'?"
Academy City's strongest Level 5 who has escaped the darkness
Accelerator
"(Ugh, I'm tired. She's going to explain more? How many more hours is she going to keep us restrained?)"
A Level 0 who went from being an underling to a proper member of the new Item
Hamazura Shiage
"This has something to do with World War III, doesn't it?"
Academy City's Level 0 student
Kamijou Touma
"Funyaahh..."
Girl saved by Hamazura
Fremea Seivelun
"Now, I suppose it's time we began the lesson."
Boss girl of the Magic Cabal known as the Dawn-Colored Sunlight
Leivinia Birdway


"Hamazura, what are you doing...?"
Member of the new Item and a Level 4 AIM Stalker
Takitsubo Rikou
"Gyaaaahhh!! Misaka doesn't care about him, so why!?"
Clone of Misaka Mikoto created by the Sisters Third Season
Misaka Worst
"Gyaaaahhh!! Misaka's position is being taken!! says Misaka as Misaka trembles due to an unexplainable sixth sense!!"
Control Tower of the Sisters
Last Order
"What direction should I head towards from now on?"
Academy City and Tokiwadai Middle School's Level 5
Misaka Mikoto

Prologue: Unknown Purpose, but Still a Threat. *Radiosonde_Castle.*

London, England.

A great number of people gathered within St. George's Cathedral.

It would not have been wrong to call them priests and nuns.

But given their current role, they would more accurately be referred to as magicians. The men and women both young and old who had been called there were exchanging all sorts of information and communicating with allies in distant lands. They were doing these things with such vigor that it destroyed the normal stillness of the cathedral.

"What is the situation?" asked an Asian magician named Kanzaki Kaori.

Her black hair was pulled back in a ponytail, her T-shirt was tied off at the bottom revealing her navel, and her denim jacket and pants had the fabric cut off, revealing one arm and one leg. She had a long Japanese sword hanging down from a Western belt, so she did not look much like someone related to the Christian Church, but even so, she was the Priestess who stood at the top of a denomination that had been passed down within Japan.

"It has risen even further than before," responded Sister Agnese.

The small girl's hair was made into braids about as thick as pencils, and she was originally from the Roman Catholic Church.

"Its altitude is now 52,000 meters. It has passed over the UK and is now heading over Eurasia… France, to be exact."

Agnese lightly waved her fingertips in midair, and a video was displayed on the cold wall of the cathedral.

It showed an area of the sky that had no clouds and almost no oxygen.

A cross-shaped construction could be seen floating in that clear blue sky whose lack of impurities actually made it seem more damaging to living things.

There was nothing around it with which to compare its scale, so it was difficult to accurately determine its size, but…

"Both its length and width are about twenty kilometers, right?"

“If something that large fell from that height, there would be no avoiding an ice age.”

“…”

Kanzaki looked at the video, and her gaze sharpened slightly.

Given its shape, its massive scale, and the fact that it was floating in the sky, Kanzaki doubted that she was the only one that was reminded of "that" fortress that had once plunged the world into chaos.

“According to the information the science side has supplied,” said Agnese as she continued her report, “the air is so thin at that altitude that an airplane cannot maintain the power needed to keep itself afloat- lift, I think they called it. And while one could reach that altitude with a rocket, it would be unable to remain at that altitude. It would just continue on up, so it would be difficult to interfere with the fortress. Either way, it will be tough to send people onto it with parachutes.”

“Then how is it floating? Is it using magic…?”

“We don’t know.” The short nun shook her head. “It seems that an Academy City-made balloon called Mesosphere Radiosonde carries an observation equipment that can float at this altitude. …Look, around here. Can you see the gas tank-like things?”

Agnese zoomed in the image, and 200 to 300 of what looked like metal spheres could be seen on the bottom of the cross-shaped fortress.

“For convenience’s sake, we have started calling the target 'Radiosonde Castle'.” She paused for a second. “The most likely candidate for what's giving it lift is this mass of balloons. The science side has a similar opinion, but they say they do not have any idea what kind of gas could give the necessary lift with only that many tanks. Of course, we don’t know if they truly do not know or if they are holding back on information.”

Kanzaki brought her hand up to her chin.

“…So we don’t even know if this enemy is from the science side or the magic side. Although they’ve suddenly taken action on a level that could destroy the world…”

“The higher ups have put together a separate unit to investigate where it originated from. It started floating up from Iceland, so it sounds like they will be investigating around there. A lot of different organizations are going to be sent out on this one. …I think it would be best if you just focused on your own job.”

The job that Kanzaki had been given was of course to resolve the issue of Radiosonde Castle.

They did not know where exactly the enemy intended to drop it, but they could not just sit idly by and let it happen.

“So what exactly am I to do?”

“It seems the science side is thinking of shooting it down with ballistic missiles, but as I said before, we do not know for sure what system is giving it lift. The balloons on the bottom are merely one theory. If something were to provide too much of a shock to the system and send it down all at once… well, it could be like an asteroid falling.”

“In other words, we need to find out how exactly the fortress is floating before we can actually do anything? And we can’t do that by viewing it from a distance, so someone has to actually get aboard Radiosonde Castle?”

“At the very least, the source of its lift has to be analyzed. And whether it’s from the magic side or the science side, we need to know whether anyone is aboard and what weapons or spiritual items it may have,” said Agnese as if she were checking things off a list one by one. “If possible, it would be best to interfere with the source of its lift while on board, thus causing it to slowly lower bit by bit. That way, this whole thing will not end in an ice age.”

“But you said there was no way to get to Radiosonde Castle, right? You said an airplane cannot get enough lift and a rocket would only pass by for an instant.”

She could not recommend using a magical means of flight.

There were plenty of ways one could fly using magic, but the magical means of being shot down were too accurate, so one could be interfered with at any time. It was so major that an extremely famous legend involving Peter, one of the twelve Christian apostles, had been created.

Of course, there was someone behind that situation.

They did not know if they were from the science side or the magic side, but if their opponent was a magician, any magical flight Kanzaki took would be easily crushed. In a situation where failure meant the destruction of humanity, Kanzaki could not use such an unstable method while she held the trump card.

“It seems our leader is currently discussing with the science side a means of interfering with Radiosonde Castle.”

“…So there are multiple options and we just need to stay put for now, hm?”

Kanzaki stared at the image on the wall, and realized that she was not properly controlling her emotions.

She was dealing with a threat to the world.

Kanzaki wondered if what she was feeling was what "that boy" had always been holding within him up until he disappeared into the Arctic Ocean at the conclusion of World War III.

As a professional magician, she had taken risky actions dealing with dangers suitable for someone of that position plenty of times, but she had not dealt with situations on such a great scale enough times to even start a count.

And in all the previous incidents she had dealt with, she had wielded her power within the relatively stable confines of the magic side. This time, however, she did not even know whether her opponent was with the science side or the magic side, so her past experience could end up being of little help.

But that boy had walked through that kind of world.

He had gone between the two worlds of science and magic and had faced many opponents and stopped many tragedies without knowing whether his own position was a stable one.

"*It is imprudent of me as a professional magician to think this…*"

His existence was a large one.

Even she, one of the fewer than twenty Saints in the world, felt that.

"*…But if only that boy were here, he would not even have to be heading to the battlefield. If only that boy were here, that alone would change the flow. Why does it seem that way to me…?*"

That boy had sunk into the Arctic Ocean and was gone.

She could no longer rely on him, so she had no choice but to continue fighting in a world where he was not.

Kanzaki did not think that she was the only one that felt that way. Even though it did not show on their faces, Itsuwa, Tatemiya Saiji, and the others of the Amakusa Church had made up their minds.

As Kanzaki got a bit mad at herself for only being able to think of him in the past tense, Itsuwa, a girl from the same Japanese denomination as her, spoke to her with one hand covering up the microphone on her cell phone.

Itsuwa had to be feeling just as down about it as Kanzaki- if not more so.

“…Umm, I just received word that Kamijou-san has returned to Academy City.”

“Ehh!? How!?”

Chapter 1: A New Territory, Magic Afterwards. *Lecture_One.*

Part 1

Kamijou Touma, Accelerator, and Hamazura Shiage had defeated the Freshmen and saved Fremea Seivelun. They were now comparing cell phones.

“Okay, let’s exchange addresses.”

“What a pain…”

“There, there, and done.”

As Hamazura operated his cell phone, he was wearing normal clothes, having changed out of the slim powered suit. It seemed he had contacted someone using the powered suit’s communicator, and they would be coming to recover the suit from where he had it hidden after removing it.

“…Hey, why does your cell phone have a torn string on it?”

“Geh… The strap came off. Ugh, such misfortune…”

“You fell into the Arctic Ocean. It’s a miracle you still have all your limbs,” said Birdway in an exasperated tone. “I know you want to come along into the territory ahead, but you won’t be able to catch up if you only look at one side of the world. In order to learn about ‘them’, you first need to look at the other side of the world.”

“They” seemed to be a major problem at some deep portion of the world.

The goal behind Kuroyoru Umidori and Silver Cross Alpha’s attempt to kill Accelerator and Hamazura Shiage via Fremea had been to prepare the system needed to fight “them”.

And then there was the other side of the world Birdway had mentioned.

If one looked at things from the viewpoint of Academy City and the science side, it was the opposite side.

It was magic.

“…I don’t mind gathering up the necessary information,” Accelerator practically spat out. “But I have no intention of having a long leisurely talk here. We defeated the people who more or less led the Freshmen, but that doesn’t mean the threat is 100% gone.”

“True.” Birdway nodded. “You two… what were your names? Anyway, as you were being directly targeted by the Freshmen, it is best to think of that as a risk. And I would like somewhere where we can sit down and talk, so we should find somewhere else to go.”

“Is there really going to be some convenient place like that?” Hamazura asked.

Birdway pointed with her thumb.

She pointed at Kamijou’s face.

“His place. …It’s the perfect place for an idiot to bow down to a girl.”

Part 2

And so, Kamijou, Accelerator, Hamazura, Fremea, Birdway, and her subordinates who wore all black headed toward a certain high school dorm.

As he walked along a twilit path, Kamijou’s shoulders seemed to droop.

Hamazura looked over with a puzzled expression.

“…What’s wrong?”

“Well…” Kamijou’s words did not have much energy behind them. “In all the confusion of World War III, it seems I’ve ended up considered dead. So… I was just thinking that a lot of people must be worried about me. And I’m not sure what the best way to meet them and apologize is. This time, I’m not going to get off with just my head bit.”

Hamazura was not sure what he meant by that last part.

Birdway smiled in a burlesque way and spoke.

“But if you’re alive, you have no real reason not to go back. Whatever path you take, you’re eventually going to walk down that one, so you should get it over with quickly.”

“Maybe I should think of it like going to the dentist…”

Upon seeing how down Kamijou looked, Hamazura made a suggestion.

“If you have to do it, you might as well give yourself a little help in the right direction, don’t you think?”

“What do you mean?”

“Drink some alcohol to bring up your spirits.”

A gradual change had come over Misaka Mikoto's mental state over the last few days.

A feeling of impatience had welled up from the depths of depression.

At the end of World War III, Kamijou Touma had disappeared into the Arctic Ocean along with a giant fortress.

Since that boy had been in the place that was the very core of that war, Mikoto thought he must have been pressured into it by some kind of power from a force that moved the world. Even if that was not the actual reason, Mikoto still felt that she needed to collect accurate information, and a lot of it.

Academy City.

The darkness there.

She did not want to approach it, but their network gathered information from around the world that should not be seen by anyone.

Mikoto had no clear point of contact with the darkness.

But she still had a way in without one.

Of course, it was risky. They may notice her attempt to get in, and if they did, they would definitely put together some kind of interception plan. It was possible that the darkness would take action the very second they suspected that she was even thinking of doing it.

But…

She had to know whether Kamijou Touma was alive or dead.

She did not want mere hopes.

She wanted actual information. If she did not have that, Misaka Mikoto could not know which direction she should head towards from then on.

After worrying through all that, Mikoto started thinking of actual methods of hacking in, but…

"Heyyy… Is that Miko-chan I see over there?"

Why was she seeing an illusion of a drunk boy talking to her?

That spiky-haired illusion had a necktie of unknown origin wrapped around its head, had a box of sushi hanging from a string grasped by the thumb and forefinger of its right hand, and was drunkenly staggering toward her bowleggedly.

No…

That was…

That was not an illusion created by someone like the #5 Level 5…

“Ehh!? Why!? Why are you here!? World War III… The Arctic Ocean… Y-you were dead… Wh-what is going on…!?”

“Mhh… Oh, yeah. I forgot somethin’ important.”

“Yes, yes, like that, like that!! Okay, tell it all to Mikoto-san. What happened after that? In fact, why did you leave Academy City and charge into the center of that war in the first place…!?”

“Here, Miko-chan, this is your souvenir...”

“That is not a souvenir!! This sushi is like something from a nostalgic Showa skit!!”

“Woof woof.”

“I can’t follow your chain of thoughts, and now you aren’t even speaking in a human language!! …What is with this? Even when Mama is at her worst, I can get through to her, but none of my experience with her is working here…!!”

Mikoto put her head in her hands while still holding the sushi box that had been handed to her, but the boy in question seemed to truly think that he had finished what he came there to do. He started to stagger off somewhere, leaving Mikoto.

If she let him get away, things would get very bad.

To put it in concrete terms, it was possible that she would end up with no scenes for three whole volumes.

Misaka Mikoto intuitively determined that fact, and frantically chased after that boy.

“Wait, stop!! Do you really think I can just accept this!? Hell no! You just left and disappeared! Today, I’m finally going to have you explain everything to me!”

“Does November even have thirty-five days…?”

“Give... It. A. Damn. Rest.
Alreaaaaaaaaadyyy

As such, the lightning spear that she accidentally fired was quite the destructive attack.

But…

“Funyari…”

“W-what!?”

Mikoto’s face paled as he evaded it with the unnatural movements characteristic of a drunk.

That spiky-haired boy had the power to easily negate the psychic power Mikoto used (but she did not know exactly how it worked). He had stopped her attacks a few times with that power in the past, but…

He no longer needed his power.

So that was it.

She had worked so hard chasing after him, yet he was saying that all her efforts had been for nothing - a statement that could not be easily dealt with.

“Now this is getting interesting…”

While Mikoto hung her head down, heated feelings welled up within her.

She had not felt such belligerent emotions in a long time.

It may have been because of her rank as the #3, but she did not get many chances to go all-out. That was the feeling she got when one of those chances came along.

The drunken Kamijou looked at Mikoto’s face.

“What’re you smilin’ for, Miko-chan. Did somethin’ good happen?”

“I-I’m not smiling!! And don’t call me Miko-chan!!”

“But tha’sh berbrarbrerb, i’n’t it?”

“Ahh!! I have no idea what you just said, but I’m betting I should deny it, given how you said it!!” Mikoto started swinging her arms around. “My power is valuable because it has both a large output and an exceedingly vast range of applications!! I’ll show you firsthand just how many types of attacks I can make wi… huh!?”

Just when Mikoto tried to point at him with her sparking finger, the spiky-haired boy was gone.

She hurriedly looked around, and found him staggering along a bit away.

But the situation was changing moment by moment.

Her thoughts simply could not keep up with the changes.

“Huh? What are you doing here?” said a black-haired girl who was approaching the spiky-haired boy and seemed like a shrine maiden outfit would suit her.

“Huhh!? Kamijou-chan, you have guts to skip school and then just go for a walk!!” shouted a girl(?) 135 cm tall who started to grab at him.

“Kamijou, how can you do this while we’re so busy preparing for the Ichihanaransai… wait, you reek of alcohol!? I can’t believe this! Why would you do something like this that shortens your own lifespan!?” said a high school girl with maddeningly huge breasts who also approached him.

“Ohh, Kamijou Touma. It’s Kamijou Touma. I don’t really care about you, but make kitty purr!”

In no time at all, they were in all directions.

“Oh, you’re the guy who called the ambulance during the Remnant incident, aren’t you?” said Musujime Awaki who she once had a confrontation with and had fair-sized breasts.

“U-um, if you were coming back, I wish you had told me,” said a high school girl with glasses and huge breasts who was wearing a Kirigaoka Academy winter uniform.

“Oh, Kamijou. I didn’t think you’d be coming back right now,” said a high school girl with even larger breasts who was wearing a navy-blue sailor uniform.

“Wait! Wait just a second!! This is my scene! If you’re going to do this, do it later!! Dammit, the guy-to-girl ratio here is completely out of balance. And is that group of huge breasts specifically targeted at me!? A-at this rate, I’ll be lost in the background…!! Did they create a forest to hide a leaf!?”

As the Biri Biri girl shouted, Kamijou did not seem to even realize that he had all these people gathered around him.

Part 3

There was a girl named Index.

She had waist-long silver hair and green eyes. Her white skin seemed to reflect light. She was a little shorter than average for her age, and she may have given an impression younger than her age. She was wearing a nun’s habit made of white cloth, with gold decorations giving it the coloration of a

teacup. However, the major stitches were undone, and it was temporarily fastened together with large safety pins.

She stood within a student dorm in District 7 of Academy City.

It was not Index's room.

In fact, she was not even a student.

That room belonged to a certain boy. Index had been freeloading there, but the boy who was supposed to be her landlord was not there. There was no proof that he would come back. Given the organization Index belonged to, it was not exactly a good thing for her to be in that city and continue living in that room. Index wondered if she should obey the organization and head back to England…

Although she did not want to do that no matter what.

She felt that if she stayed here, he would pop up eventually. Index felt that if she gave up or left, she would be cutting off the possibility of that happening no matter how miniscule it may be. …Index had gotten to the point of thinking about things in terms of jinxes like that.

She was acting selfishly.

The organization she belonged to was allowing her that selfishness.

Perhaps they were doing so out of concern for Index herself. Or perhaps they were doing so out of concern for that boy who had disappeared in the middle of World War III in order to stop it.

"Touma…"

She quietly called his name.

The dorm room's other freeloading resident– well, this one was actually a pet– was a calico cat named Sphinx. The cat had its head inside a package that had been a souvenir from England and was eating the contents. It seemed to be saying, "I'd heard so much about British food, but the pet food is really just the same."

Only one who had leeway in her heart would have been able to smile at that unchanging scene.

She had gone beyond that point and instead felt a twinge of unease at seeing something continuing on unchanged despite having lost something.

Would he return?

How long should she continue staying here?

Was there any meaning to it?

Did there have to be a meaning to it?

She was unable to control her own emotions. The thoughts that should have been collected in a single place were scattered across her face. Those fragmentary thoughts brought forth various opinions like a short-circuit in some wiring, creating sparks; but there was no unity to the random images. If she collected them all up, there would surely be some contradictions.

If there was an opportunity, things would greatly tilt.

It was like a large board balanced atop a sharp stake. Wherever you placed your finger on the board, it would collapse in one direction or another.

She may have been remaining completely stationary because she was thoughtlessly trying to maintain that perilous balance.

Index was temporarily frozen like that while holding her memories that were much too fresh, but then the final slight force was added on.

"…This is…?"

It was the cell phone Kamijou Touma had given her. It was one of those electronic devices that she still had not mastered the use of and still needed Kamijou's help with despite her perfect memory. And it was a communications device that might be able to connect her to that boy if she only knew how to use it.

Upon seeing it, Index's heart tilted greatly.

Not even she knew which direction it had tilted in.

Index grabbed the cat that still had its head inside the pet food package, and headed for the entrance of the dorm room. Nothing would happen if she only waited. It did not matter whether she had any clues or not. Index was just about to charge out into the outside world in order to search for that boy when…

"U-uhhh… S-s-sorry for keepin' you waitin'…"

Kamijou Touma opened the door and came in dragging over ten girls with him, making him look like a magnet covered in iron sand after being dropped in a sand pit.

At first, Index only blinked a few times.

Immediately afterwards, she grasped the situation.

"T-Touma!! You were gone this whole time, so I was worried! Just what are you doing!?"

"Hic… Eh? Whaddya mean?"

“I was just about to say that you were being way too much like your normal self, Touma, but there’s someone I clearly don’t know mixed in!!”

“Hello, I’m the new beast girl heroine. I just met him over there.”

The situation had become chaotic to the extreme and Kamijou, the person who would normally explain what was going on, was utterly knocked out, so Index had no way of dealing with it.

And…

Part 4

Accelerator and Hamazura Shiage were watching that uproar from a distance.

Just when that boy had gotten drunk, he had walked off somewhere on his own. The next thing they knew, he had a hold on a great number of girls.

“Thanks for leading the way… wait, why the hell is Musujime there, too?”

He no longer had anything to do with the dark side organization of Group, but he still had not expected to run into one of the former members here.

The #1 muttered in an exasperated way (but he also admired the fact that Kamijou Touma had a side to him other than just fighting and that he managed to let both sides coexist).

“I’ll call him ‘teacher’.”

Hamazura didn't put much thought into it, and said that to no one in particular.

Part 5

Takitsubo Rikou, a girl in a track suit, was eating a corn dog she had bought at a convenience store when her sleepy eyes suddenly opened wide.

“…Hamazura is heading down a path of evil!!”

Part 6

The girls that were the iron sand clinging to the magnet named Kamijou Touma were politely persuaded to leave the dorm by Birdway’s

subordinate Mark Space and the others dressed all in black (but some of them were given afros from high-voltage currents and there was a forced promise to explain everything in detail later).

While biting the back of Kamijou's head, Index caught sight of Accelerator and stared blankly at him.

"It's the lost child guy."

"…What kind of way to remember someone is that?" muttered Accelerator.

But he did not continue that conversation. That was due both to his personality and the fact that he did not want to remember the 0930 incident.

Birdway cheerfully stuck her legs under the kotatsu in the center of the room.

"Hurry up and take a seat. This isn't some pottery class for housewives. I have no intention of looking over your shoulder and making sure you're doing everything right."

And so, Kamijou Touma, Accelerator, and Hamazura Shiage sat down on the remaining three sides of the square kotatsu.

"Nyaahh," muttered Fremea.

For some reason, she sat down on Hamazura's lap after he got under the kotatsu.

"My spot," was all she said, but she must have been worn out from being chased by the Freshmen because she fell asleep after fifteen seconds.

Birdway sighed.

"Are you ready to listen now?"

"…I guess, even though I don't know what it is I'm getting ready for," Hamazura responded while lightly supporting Fremea who looked like she was about to slip off him.

Birdway paid him no heed.

"Then let's get this long-awaited explanation started."

As she spoke, she glanced over at Index.

Index Librorum Prohibitorum.

She knew her role, but it was Birdway that spoke.

“I will be explaining to you about ‘them’ who are no longer something you don’t have to worry about… and about magic, another set of laws that is at the base of the matter.”

Part 7

Unabara Mitsuki was inside an Academy City hospital.

He himself was not a patient; he was visiting people he knew.

“…It’s gotten rather dark. I guess I should bring this visit to an end,” he said.

The room looked like a normal hospital room, but someone who had experience with hospitalizations may have noticed that something was not quite right. It was not a large room with 4-6 patients in it, nor was it an individual room used by a single patient.

It was a large room with only two beds inside.

Only an eccentric person could have arranged that irregular layout.

The girl lying in one of the two beds spoke.

“…I don’t remember asking you to come. You just visit every day no matter what I say.”

The girl’s name was Xochitl.

As her name made clear, she was not Japanese. She had swarthy skin and wavy black hair. She belonged to a magical organization that had its origins in the Central American Aztecs. As one would expect of someone like that, she had been armed with eerie occult weapons, but they had been confiscated by the Unabara boy.

And in the other bed was another girl from the same culture as Xochitl. Her name was Tochtli. The names Xochitl and Tochtli were famous names in their language.

Tochtli said, “Yeah, but if you didn’t stop by one day, I’m pretty sure she would at least tear her pillow to pieces. For the sake of my peaceful hospitalization, make sure you keep up your visits, *onii-chan*.”

“You’ve got it all wrong. I’m a Corpse Worker, so being in a place like this makes me feel like I’m being left behind. That’s what has me so irritated.”

“In other words, she’s saying that you have the effect of alleviating that irritation.”

Unabara smiled as he watched Tochtli turn aside Xochitl’s glare.

And at the same time, he thought.

Originally, Unabara Mitsuki had been one who worked in the darkness of Academy City. In order to wipe away that city's darkness, he had charged into that darkness and had continually fought alongside the collection of suspicious people such as Accelerator, Tsuchimikado Motoharu, and Musujime Awaki that was Group.

Of course, that darkness had continually interfered so as to rob Unabara of his freedom, but he had felt himself suddenly come free of those bonds a few days before.

For instance, there was that hospital room.

Normally, there would have been at least two garbage men stationed to watch those girls who were used as hostages against him, but those people had disappeared at some point.

He had not been in contact with the other members of Group.

He had not contacted them, and they had not contacted him.

From what Unabara had investigated on his own, it seemed that it was not just Group. The darkness had drawn back from various fields within Academy City.

Something had changed during World War III.

He was betting that Accelerator, Tsuchimikado Motoharu, and Musujime Awaki had been affected by it as well.

He wondered how they were reacting to that change in the world.

Now that the members of the darkness were no longer bound by the darkness, *what had happened to the environment surrounding that girl who bound Unabara Mitsuki more than anything else*?

Should he just give in to that peace?

Or should he charge back into the darkness?

While Unabara thought carefully about what direction he should head towards, he heard one of the girls in the hospital room speak.

"By the way, I have a question for you."

"What?"

"…Etzali. I understand that *Unabara Mitsuki's face* was convenient when you were infiltrating Academy City, but why are you *still using that false face* while in this hospital room with only your comrades?"

"Well…" Unabara started to say, but Tochtli spoke up, sounding annoyed.

“Just realize it already, Xochitl. Being beautiful gives you an advantage in this world. That’s how he gets the information he needs from the women in the places he infiltrates.”

Unabara heard a slight snapping sound.

Xochitl had bent the three-dimensional puzzle she had been messing with out of boredom into an odd shape.

“N-no, that is not it, Xochitl! This face was the most suitable one to approach the target with. I did not choose it based on whether it was beautiful or not. And our disguise spell needs human skin, so I have just been using the face I already had so that I do not have to cause any unnecessary harm.”

“And what is with that creepy polite way of speaking!! Etzali, that is not how you used to speak!!”

“…Hey, don’t stand up so suddenly, Xochitl. It’s an important job, so don’t get so mad just because your old friend has become a lady-killer. Just refer to him how you used to, as Etzali-oniichan.”

Tochtli’s grin made it clear that she had realized something and was gleefully pouring more oil on the fire.

“Etzali…” said Xochitl in a low voice. “If you don’t want to have it ripped off without the release spell, do something about that face right this instant.”

Unabara put on a vague smile as she clawed at his face like a cat.

Part 8

“If I just suddenly started explaining about ‘them’, I don’t think you would understand, so I first need to explain magic and magicians which are the soil from which ‘they’ have grown,” said Birdway.

That must have been nothing more than a world Kamijou Touma was already knowledgeable of because he showed no sign of surprise at hearing what Birdway said.

The main audience for that explanation was Accelerator and Hamazura Shiage.

“As I’m sure you have already guessed, magic is unrelated to your scientific laws. It is what is known as the occult. Those who use it are able to shoot fire from their hands, shoot water out, heal wounds, or make wounds rot.”

Hamazura felt that it would have spread even more than scientific psychic powers if it was truly something that convenient.

As if in response to Hamazura's doubts, Birdway glanced over at Index.

Index spoke from a position a bit away from the kotatsu.

"But magic is not that convenient. If you exclude certain exceptions, magic essentially exists to allow those without talent to catch up to those with talent."

"Simply put, the incompetent use it to supplement what they cannot do properly on their own," Birdway finished.

Humans could of course not fly without using tools.

It may have been possible for the espers that Academy City had brought forth, but that was still a method supported by a scientific approach.

And that remained true whether it was an esper artificially created using drugs and electric stimuli or one of the people known as Gemstones who were espers that had been created by chance due to a combination of things in the natural environment.

"Someone envied them."

Birdway smiled.

That smile did not have a single bit of warmth in it and would freeze anyone who saw it.

"In a time before there was a distinction between science and the occult, someone was jealous of some kind of religious miracle or the powers they saw in a natural esper which the environment had created by pure chance. This person did not understand what they saw, but he yearned for it. He wanted to be special himself, and he began to feel that it was unacceptable for him be normal. That was how it began."

That was why magic and religion were so strictly partitioned off.

Most often, the idea of humans trying to catch up with true miracles was seen as arrogant.

The pure-white nun said, "…Magic prospered as a whole because even if the world is overflowing in mystery, it does not necessarily function in humans' favor."

Birdway grinned.

"But this magic that was created out of the incompetence complex of the incompetent is quite convenient. For example, the scientific powers you use are just one per person, right?"

"Well, yeah," said Hamazura.

However, he did not rely on his power as he was a Level 0, so he did not have a real sense of whether it was convenient or not.

Accelerator cut in with an additional explanation.

"…If you want to change your attack pattern, the main issues are how to apply your base power and whether you can actually do it or not. For example, a fire-producing esper could use that fire to create smoke and rob their opponent of oxygen. What of it?"

Instead of Birdway, it was Kamijou who responded.

"Magic does not have that restriction."

"Exactly. That is why we can freely produce fire."

Birdway snapped her fingers, and a lighter-sized flame appeared on the end of her index finger.

"And water."

She snapped her fingers again, and a golf ball-sized sphere of water put out the flame.

"Of course, there is a set of laws at the base of it all. It could be Celtic or Norse, for example. But even then, there is no strict division. Things from one base can be drawn in by another base, like how Norse mythology was influenced by Celtic culture."

"…That does sound more convenient when compared to us espers who can't do anything about it once our power type and Level are known via the System Scan," Hamazura muttered.

Birdway meaninglessly puffed out her chest in pride.

"Yes, it is convenient. It doesn't matter if it's wanting to fly or wanting to be popular with the ladies. Once you have a clear goal, you just have to *create a supernatural setting* so that things will end up the way you want. Compared to you, where it is dependent on your inherent talent, that works as a major advantage. Of course, the delicate adjustments are an indispensable hardship."

If that's true… Hamazura thought, *maybe even one branded as untalented like me can gain the power needed to protect Takitsubo, Mugino, Kinuhata, and Fremea from any coming threats.*

But then Index started speaking.

"But you all mustn't use magic."

"Eh? What do you mean?"

"…"

Hamazura let out a puzzled cry, but Accelerator gave no real reaction, as if he knew something.

Birdway said, "Weren't you listening? Magic is a technique created to allow those without talent to catch up to those with talent. It's an issue of the format. It was not created for people who have talent in the first place. If you force yourself to use it, it would put a massive burden on your blood vessels and nerves."

Kamijou Touma cut in there.

"By the way, even if you're a Level 0, you still had the inside of your head messed with by Academy City's tech. Due to that, I can't use magic either. …The same most likely goes for those in Skill-Out."

"Magic is just as much of a collection of specialized skills and knowledge as science is. The *supernatural setting* takes time and effort. It would be more efficient for you to refine the skills you have than to spend over ten years preparing something that would send you to a bloody grave the first time you used it."

"Then why are you giving us this long-ass lecture?"

"Because 'they' are baring their fangs using that setting," said Birdway in response to Accelerator's question. "Even if you can't use it, it's still good to know the rules behind it if you are going to be creating a countermeasure. Or do you just plan on continuing to fumble around against a mysterious enemy that uses some unknown set of laws?"

"What's the actual process used?" asked Accelerator in a low voice.

In the final stages of the war in Russia, he had brought about a similar-seeming phenomenon by using the information from some mysterious parchments as the base and switching out some of the secondary operations.

But that voice and that glare that could make even the darkness of that city tremble had no effect on that girl.

"That of course changes based on the denomination and the school of thought." Birdway shooed away the troublesome-seeming calico cat that had jumped up on the table. "Basically, it all starts by refining one's life force into magic power. Even in the magic side, there are a flood of different theories as to the definition of the soul, so this part is rather difficult to explain… If you think of the energy flowing through the human body as crude oil, then it is necessary to refine it into gasoline before using magic."

Index picked up the explanation from there.

“One simple method is to use certain breathing techniques. But that is just one example of controlling one’s body. It can also be meditation, warming-up exercises, or fasting. Basically, you just have to manipulate bodily functions such as the flow of blood and the rhythm of the organs to bring them to the values you want.”

“…As people with some scientific knowledge, you probably know this, but most of the internal organs cannot be consciously controlled. Forcing a change in them is what allows one to refine that normally unreachable energy. But the internal organs function automatically because the alternative is dangerous. It’s the same reason that a computer’s system files are hidden by default. If someone without the proper knowledge were to mess with them, there is a danger of it coming back to bite them in the ass. In the past, that kind of thing seems to have been mistaken for divine punishment or a curse,” Birdway said. “Once you have the magic power needed to use magic, you just have to manipulate that power into the form that matches your wishes. There are many different types of vehicles, such as cars, motorcycles, boats, and airplanes, but they all still spin turbines using explosive power. …If you want to cross the ocean, you first need to think about what kind of vehicle you need, and you need to create the most suitable fuel by refining crude oil.”

Birdway adjusted her legs within the kotatsu.

“This magic power is manufactured from the power that humans naturally possess, so it can be controlled relatively easily by the human will. But commands are needed for that purpose. It is possible to construct them from nothing, but that is just too inefficient. It’s much easier to reference an already existing legend or story. After all, the legends that are still widely known today and have not been weeded out are the ones that have a suitable answer in them.”

“'That have not been weeded out'? 'A suitable answer'?” asked Kamijou despite having already witnessed magic to a certain extent.

Index mimed holding a pen in her right hand.

“It is easier to write with your hand than with your foot. And it is usually easier to write with your right hand than with your left. …That is common knowledge that has spread throughout most of the world. Do you follow me so far?”

“I suppose…”

“But it is easier to write with your right hand because people have been writing with their right hands for ages and ages. The parent teaches the child, and the child teaches the grandchild. It keeps getting passed down like that. As many people have continued writing with their right hands, a method of neatly writing has naturally formed around that. …If people had started writing with their left feet from the beginning, then a culture of writing with the left foot would have been created.”

“So, creating a command from nothing is like beginning to practice writing with one’s left foot now?” muttered Kamijou.

Birdway nodded.

“But even so, the new application of magic power is not impossible. If you worked hard and mastered that path, you may even catch up to the right hand. But would that have any meaning? Maybe if you could not use your right hand, but when you can use your right hand, it’s much more efficient to just use it. And the optimization of this age’s culture is moving ahead in that way. And the situation changes even more depending on whether you are using a religious system in order to create the phenomenon you want or are trying to create a phenomenon within your faith in a religious system,” Birdway said. “One can use magic just by sending magic power through one’s own blood vessels and nerves and by creating symbols with one’s gestures. However, when performing more precise ceremonies, specialized tools are often used. For example, when referencing a story involving a legendary spear, it is more efficient to actually swing around a spear. Think of it as the difference between drawing a straight line with just a pen and drawing it with a straightedge.”

She said that, but old-fashioned legendary items were not necessarily needed.

The shape and function were all that was needed, so a plastic umbrella or a clothesline pole could be used in place of the spear. But adding details decreased the odds of failure, so various additional things could be done, such as attaching a knife to the end of the plastic umbrella.

Things like that may end up looking like mysterious objects with no real meaning behind them to a normal person.

“Those tools are known as spiritual items. With some exceptions, spiritual items are nothing more than tools. They are not something that is equipped to the oil refinery that is a magician. When a magician holds a spiritual item, the item becomes a part of the magician’s body, and a portion of the magic power flowing through his blood vessels and veins is circulated through it. A staff that shoots fire will only function once that much is done. But power

can also be provided remotely, and with certain spiritual items, the magic power will circulate within it for a bit after the magician lets go of it," Birdway explained. "These days, safety devices are incorporated into them, but in the past, the destruction of a spiritual item would sever that circulation and damage the magician. Symbolic weapons are the representative example of spiritual items. They are produced and consecrated by the user and no one else is allowed to touch them, but that is just out of fear that someone else interfering with it could cause the circulation to be incomplete."

With Birdway's knowledge of magic, she likely knew examples of such failures.

But she merely kept a thin smile on her face and moved on without mentioning any.

"If we think of spiritual items in terms of the theatre, they include everything from the small props carried in the actors' hands to the large props arranged on the stage. Means of support any larger than that would be a temple that I guess could be said to correspond to the theatre itself. Of course, dividing things up raises their effectiveness."

"…"

"By the way, so far I have only been explaining magic that is based on magic power refined by an individual. However, there are other types of energy. There are the leylines that cause things in the earth and Telesma which is a power accumulated in a different phase of this same world. That kind of power holds great energy, but unlike magic power, it often is aligned with an element from the beginning."

To use that, it was necessary to choose magic that matched the nature of the energy rather than creating energy to use magic.

"There's probably no real reason to explain this far," Birdway prefaced her next explanation. "But that kind of power is activated by invoking it through the use of the magic power humans have. I suppose it's similar to the relationship between a bomb and the fuse. The fuse creates a small explosion that causes a reaction that has tremendous explosive force. …This of course allows one to use spells of a level that would have been impossible with an individual's magic power, but the great change in the scale of the 'explosion' increases the risks. …At any rate, just remember that someone who cannot use their individual magic power cannot use something on a large scale like Telesma either."

Index then started to speak.

“There are some people who can directly control Telesma by using the similarity in their own magic power and the Telesma energy, but it is a rather rare case, so it is not too important that you know about it. …And because of the great amount of power those people use, they are greatly restricted by the angels that correspond to their type. Due to this, they are unable to use normal magic and their overall level of freedom drops.”

Birdway completely ignored the cat lying face-up right in front of her as she started speaking again.

“Now then, all this has been an explanation of the structure at the base of a magician, but that is not the most important thing you need to know in order to understand magicians.”

“…What do you mean?”

“It is an issue of identity. For what purpose do magicians wield magic? If you do not know that, you cannot speak of magicians.”

“So this is about the structure of their organizations? They stand opposite Academy City, right? They must control truly good-for-nothing organizations.”

“I will explain that in a bit, but first I’m going to teach you something more basic about magicians.” Birdway grinned. “State religions, magic cabals, tribes… Magicians do of course form those kinds of organizations, but very few magicians will sacrifice themselves for those organizations. They only wield their power for themselves. Well, there are some groups built up of magic users who claim that sacrificing themselves for their organization is their personal goal, but the personal aspect still remains.”

“…?”

Accelerator looked confused because he could not imagine that.

That may have been because he had been put inside a large organization and had continually been bound by it.

“As has been said, magicians are people with no talent.”

“What do you mean?”

“There are setbacks in life. You may fail in saving a loved one from an incurable disease, or you may end up fighting and killing comrades during a famine. …No one would even think of trying to overcome the laws of physics if they did not have an experience like that. People who are satisfied will just stay where they are. The people who rely on the supernatural power of magic have reasons leading them to do so.”

After saying that, Birdway jabbed her thumb into the center of her small chest.

“Magicians carve that goal into themselves in Latin. These are known as magic names. Mine is Regnum771, and Mark over there’s is Armare091. The numbers on the end are to prevent duplicates. …We clearly decide on our goal and put together spells in order to accomplish that goal, so to us, an organization is nothing more than a booster used to realize our magic names. If we can use them, we will honor them and swear loyalty to them, but if they will not carry out that role, we will grow disillusioned and mercilessly cut ourselves from them. Academy City alone produces and manages all espers as the project of a giant organization. Compared to you, our way of thinking is different at the very core.”

“…Does that even work?” Accelerator asked doubtfully. “If everyone is just using their power however they want, the controlling organizations wouldn't be able to have their wishes carried out by those at their outer edges. Wouldn’t that just fall apart on its own?”

“Of course, the magic side organizations have their own rewards and punishments prepared,” replied Index. “There are large ceremonies that cannot be carried out by an individual, and there are often pursuit units to take care of traitors. But none of that matters in the face of a magic name.”

“…”

Everyone fell silent, and Birdway continued.

“That is why the magician named Sherry Cromwell entered this city on her own in order to cause a war between the magic side and the science side. It is also why Lidvia Lorenzetti took the Croce di Pietro without permission in order to rule Academy City. …No matter how large the organization they are a part of is, those who will do something will do it. Even if one’s magic name would smash the system of the world to pieces, a true magician would not hesitate to carry it out. And that remains true even if it extends beyond the magic side they live in and involves the other world as well.”

“…So ‘they’ are like that, too?” Accelerator muttered.

Even the #1 who knew the darkness quite well had too much he did not know. He envisioned a set of scales hidden beneath the surface that would decide whether Academy City would remain or be destroyed.

“Whoever ‘they’ are that you are fighting without my knowledge, they have magic names, too?”

Birdway grinned at that question.

“That is why it was necessary for me to explain the basics of magic before explaining ‘them’.”

Silence fell over the dorm room.

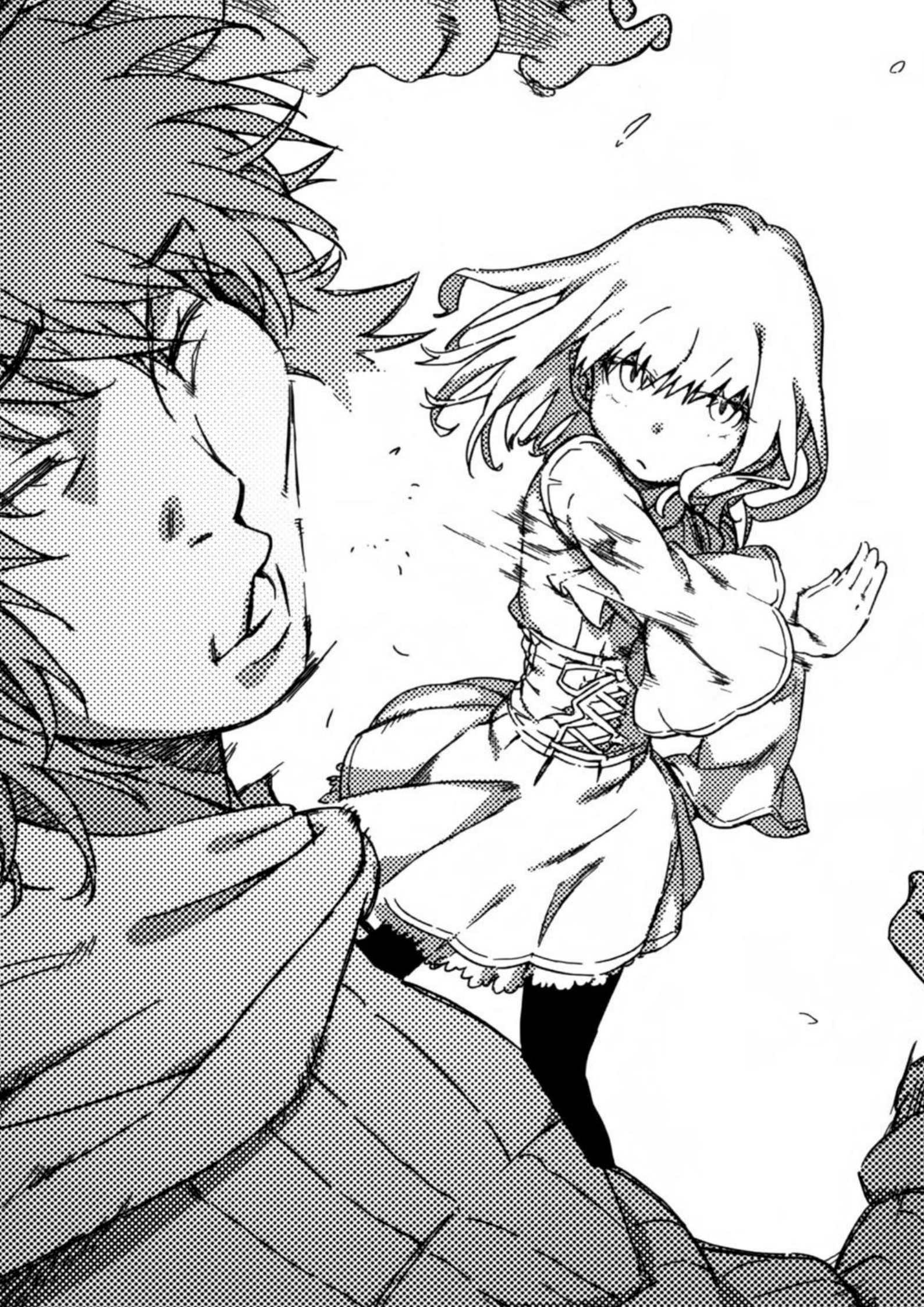
Those three boys who had been stained with the rules of Academy City thought for a bit.

Kamijou Touma had to have already known of the situation to a certain extent, so he was likely thinking through it all again after hearing Birdway’s explanation.

“*…The problem is which set of rules will succeed if science and magic clash- no, technically that isn’t it. If things tilt in either direction, the situation will no longer be one where both sides can accept the other in the end. If we want to truly resolve this, we need to*create a third side that does not belong to the other two*.*”

Accelerator sorted through the information of that world he had touched on in the past and had now taken a large step into.

“*…I have no interest in magic or an unknown world, but if the aftereffects of some people doing things without my knowledge will reach the areas I do know about, that changes. I’m still not sure exactly who ‘they’ are, but it looks like I need to get some more detailed information.*”



And Hamazura Shiage stared blankly as if he were deep in thought.

"*…Y'know, when I think about it, 'omanma'*[1] *is just barely a Japanese word.*"

At the other end of Hamazura's gaze was the cat devouring the contents of a plate that Index had put down.

Hamazura Shiage was the type who was very bad at paying attention to what a school principal was saying. Leivinia Birdway put on an expressionless face, and forcefully struck his cheek with the palm of her small hand.

"Obh!? Obhah!!"

"…You fell asleep while I was explaining all that, didn't you?"

"I didn't, I didn't! I was listening!!"

"Then tell me what I was talking about!!"

"Eh… Umm… 'if you drink milk, your tits will get bigger'…?"

"…I assume I can take that as you challenging me to a fight."

"Then was it 'if someone drinks tits, their milk will-'?"

"That doesn't even make sense!! Ahh, go wash your face!!"

Between the Lines 1

Southwest of England, near Land's End, Kanzaki Kaori lightly breathed in the smell of the sea wind through her nostrils. She purposefully looked around her surroundings to renew her focus.

The ocean surrounded her in all 360 degrees.

Her footing moved slightly up and down, matching the rhythm of the waves.

However, she was not aboard a boat.

She was on top of a pitch-black submarine poking above the ocean's surface.

"…I never thought that a magician such as myself would be receiving the assistance of one of these," she muttered.

A familiar voice reached her from the card-shaped spiritual item next to her ear. On the other side of the spiritual communication item was Sherry Cromwell from the Anglican Church.

“It’s because England does not currently have any ground-based facilities from which to fire a ballistic missile. Of course, the same goes for rocket facilities that use missile technology for peaceful purposes.”

In that country, ballistic missiles were primarily SLBMs- that is, submarine-launched ballistic missiles.

Launching a manned rocket from a submarine was unprecedented, but it was not impossible given the technology. The reason that more facilities did not do it was that they had no reason to. Unlike ballistic missiles, there was no reason to hide the launching point of a manned rocket being used for a (supposedly) peaceful purpose. In fact, if it was not announced beforehand, it could be mistaken for a missile and shot down and a ballistic missile could even be fired back in retaliation.

The reason that Kanzaki was using such a roundabout method was simple.

As Sherry had said, England had no ground-based launching facilities.

“Let me double-check. We are using this rocket as a means to interfere with Radiosonde Castle which is at an altitude of 52,000 meters, right?”

“Yes,” responded Sherry. “Neither an aircraft nor a rocket is suitable for use at that altitude. They’re likely staying there for that very reason. That is why we are sending a rocket up into space first and then having it reenter the atmosphere *to land on top of Radiosonde Castle*.”

“…That certainly is a broad plan.”

“That is why we called you. A Saint can probably force that broad plan to work. You’ll go up and then fall back down. …It sounds simple in words, but there are a lot of challenges. There had to be countermeasures against cosmic rays and the heat of the atmosphere, there’s the issues of the pressure and the oxygen, and then there’s the flight dynamics technology that goes into landing accurately on top of Radiosonde Castle.”

“So you’re saying that just dropping the rocket down from above the fortress is not enough.”

“Magical flight may be blocked, but a rocket made of scientific technology is truly defenseless against magic. Just in case, it would be best to maintain an environment with magical protection while reentering the atmosphere.”

“…Do we still not know whether Radiosonde Castle is from the magic side or the science side?”

“Orsola and others are investigating that now, but I doubt they’ll have an answer by the time you launch,” Sherry responded bitterly. “We don’t know which techniques it uses. Of course, we also do not know why it is floating

there. Is there a meaning in it being there? Is there a meaning in bringing it down? We don't even know that. We have not heard anyone saying what they intend to do with it. It has been complete silence. We can't even be sure that we will ever find out who is behind it as the situation develops."

Kanzaki sighed.

"I understand that I should use some magical protection, but what about magic interfering with the flight?"

"Oh, that is only an issue when you are trying to keep a stable flight. For this, everything up until you reach orbit will be carried out by the scientific rocket. After that, you will only be falling. Peter's spell brings down things that are actually flying. It will not be very effective on something that is simply falling."

Finding loopholes was the basis of magic.

Those loopholes would be closed up each time, but then you just had to find a new loophole opened up by that change. That repeated cycle in construction caused the entire magic side to writhe like a living being.

At that time, the submarine's hatch opened, and a member of the crew peered out. He gestured to get Kanzaki's attention. Making sure she was looking at him, the crew member spoke.

"It's almost time!! Please come inside and head to the missile tube. Head through the maintenance passageway, and climb inside the rocket."

"Understood."

"And…" said the crew member, sounding troubled.

The submarine was being borrowed on the orders of Queen Elizard, but the crew did not properly understand magic. Many occult phenomena had occurred during British Halloween and World War III, but that was not enough to grasp how it all worked.

"We do not have any spacesuits aboard. Did you bring that kind of thing with you?"

"No," Kanzaki simply responded.

She did not realize that the smooth way she had spoken had sent the crew member down into confusion.

"Y-you don't mean that you intend to go up in your jeans like that, do you!?"

"I do. This just does not seem like an incident where a normal spacesuit would be of any use."

Chapter 2: Unchanging Days, Occasional Differences. *Lecture_Two.*

Part 1

“Really, Kamijou-chan is quite troublesome,” said Tsukuyomi Komoe, a 135-cm-tall female teacher. As she walked through the city at night, a girl named Himegami Aisa who had long black hair walked alongside her.

Himegami had originally lived in Komoe’s apartment, but she had since moved to a girl’s dorm for her school.

Komoe held her small head in her small hands.

“Kamijou-chan must have no idea what an attendance record is. Uuu… at this rate, he’ll be in trouble even with extra lessons over winter break… And he didn’t have enough days during the first term either…”

“With the way he is, I find it strange that he has managed up until now.”

“Whether you are smart or not, you are going to get bad grades on your tests if you never even take in the fundamental knowledge. I doubt he has just been sleeping this whole time, so something must have been entering his head in place of his lessons… Just what could be filling Kamijou-chan’s head?”

“Hmm.” Himegami looked up a bit. “With him, I could see it being methods of defeating a dragon.”

“Something like that is not going to be helpful in life!! He should at least be filling his head with the knowledge and skills needed to live a peaceful life!!”

Part 2

Even if she gave successive lectures, it was meaningless if the information would not enter their heads.

Thinking that, Birdway decided to take a short break.

She snapped her fingers, calling over one of the men wearing all black.

“Mark, I’m thirsty. Make me a cocktail. Make it a Cinderella.”

“A Cinderella?” Kamijou asked, having heard from the side, and for some reason, Birdway puffed her chest out proudly.

“It’s the representative example of a nonalcoholic cocktail.”

And then Mark secretly taught Kamijou the truth:

“…It’s just a mixed juice drink made of orange juice, pineapple juice, and lemon juice.”

“It’s a nonalcoholic cocktail!!”

She kicked Mark in the shin with her small foot, and he hurriedly escaped to the kitchen space.

Meanwhile, Fremea, who had been Hamazura’s private hot water bottle girl up until then, flipped over the approaching cat and started playing with it. The cat seemed to be saying, “I know that male calico cats are rare, but don’t stare at my balls like that,” but it made no frantic movements.

“…That cat looks like it’s gotten bigger since I last saw it…” Kamijou said looking puzzled.

Birdway refolded her black stocking-covered legs as she sat on the bed, and spoke.

“That’s how it is with the growth of a kid.”

She had been speaking about the kitten, but Fremea was the one that reacted.

She rolled the cat around on top of the kotatsu and looked over at Birdway.

“Nyah. In the first place, you do not look like an older sister.”

“It seems you do not know the truth of matters, you damn brat.” With her legs still crossed, Birdway folded her arms. “There is a large gap between 10 and 12. I live in a different world from a brat like you who still bathes with her father!!”

“I live in a dorm, so in the first place my father has nothing to do with this.” Fremea pressed against the pads of the cat’s paws with her finger. “And I’m enough of an adult to sleep in the dark without a nightlight.”

“Wh-what!? Aren’t you afraid of someone suddenly attacking you in the night!?”

Birdway plainly jumped up from the bed.

Fremea stretched the cat’s mouth and peered in at its white teeth.

“And in the first place I know that Santa Claus really does exist.”

“What, how did you learn about the Nicholas Foundation!? I guess you are one of Academy City’s even if you look like that. I can’t take you lightly…!!”

"…Um, I think there's a disconnect in what the two of you are talking about," Kamijou quietly pointed out, but it seemed that Birdway could not hear him as she trembled.

And then Fremea brought down the finishing blow.

"And I wear a bra, so in the first place I'm the winner."

"What are you trying to do!? Are you trying to pick a fight with me, you damn brat!?!?!?"

With the sound of slicing wind, Birdway pulled out a spiritual magic sword item. The cause may indeed have been the fact that the boss of the magic cabal known as the Dawn-Colored Sunlight did not wear a bra.

But given the situation, Birdway was the one at a disadvantage.

She puffed her chest out in desperation and spoke.

"H-hmph. I lead the highest ranking Golden-style magic cabal, so I do not need to show off to a brat like you. After all, you're just a brat that can only get someone stupid-looking like that Hamazura to obey you."

"Nyahh!!" Fremea Seivelun's tension reached its maximum. "Don't say bad things about Hamazura. If you say anything more, it's a duel!!"

"Ho hohhh…"

As she held the magic sword, Birdway's eyes turned to a color filled with sadism.

"Eh? She wouldn't really go all-out on a civilian kid, would she?" Kamijou said as he put himself on guard while looking at that person who (tentatively) held the number three spot in the super sadist world rankings, but the situation developed in an unexpected direction.

"You want to take me on one-on-one? Interesting. I will accept any challenge to a duel. Now, what method should we use to settle this?"

Fremea then stood up from the kotatsu for some reason, and slowly brought her clenched fists down on the table with her waist still raised up.

"Hakkeyoi[1]…"

"What!?"

When Mark returned to the kotatsu with the mixed juice drink (that his superior obstinately insisted was a nonalcoholic cocktail), he for some reason saw two blonde girls in their early teens grappling.

"Ow!? Hey, in real sumo wrestling, grabbing hair is against the rules!!"

“Nyahh!! In the first place, I cannot allow myself to lose here!! Gyaohhh!!”

“Listen to what… I’m saying, you damn braaaaaaaaaattttttttt!!”

As Birdway yelled out, she wrapped her arms around Fremea’s waist and performed a German suplex, bringing her down onto the bed.

The skirts of both the one performing the technique and the one receiving it made it quite a show, but they did not seem to care.

“Fwa ha ha ha ha ha!! You brat, you damn brat!! It’s one hundred years too early for someone who still wears a Japanese red randoseru to oppose the boss of a cabal!!”

Kamijou and Mark exchanged a wordless glance, and they ended up calling up Leivinia Birdway’s little sister who was in London.

“Something my sister doesn’t like? I guess that would be panties with a large rabbit on them or anything spicy.”

The two of them added a large amount of chili sauce to the Cinderella, making it Mexican style in order to make Birdway end up writhing about on the floor.

Part 3

In an apartment in District 8, Kumokawa Seria, a girl who had been wearing the uniform of the school that Kamijou Touma went to, was lying sprawled on a sofa in only her underwear.

She was in an apartment rather than a dorm room.

Not only was that rare, but it was also impossible without some kind of special circumstances. Even the rich girls from Tokiwadai Middle School that spent 40,000 yen on food lived in dorms. But Kumokawa submitted to her situation as if it were normal. In fact, *she would not let herself be at the level of some rich girl*.

“…Mhh.”

She had gotten a little fired up when she had run into Kamijou Touma in the city earlier, but she had since cooled her head. Kumokawa had returned to her apartment and then collapsed on her sofa where she had fallen fast asleep. She could not remember when she had removed her uniform, so she had likely subconsciously been annoyed by the stiff clothing and had taken it off in her sleep.

A plain electronic tone came from her mobile device.

Still lying on the sofa, she groped around with her hand on top of the table, trying to grab it. However, she could only just barely touch the hard object with the tips of her fingers. She accidentally knocked it away with her own hand, and it fell to the ground.

Kumokawa thought for a bit, and then turned over on the sofa.

However, it seemed that the fall to the ground had hit some button or other. An old man's face was displayed on the screen, and a voice with an exasperated tone came from it.

"…For now, just put on some clothes and fix your hair. Without your headband, I can't see your face."

Kumokawa waved her hand around, but she was unable to grab her headband from the table either. It, too, was knocked to the ground.

She made a signal with her eyes, and the entire room's lighting switched to sleep mode.

"Wait, don't go to sleep. I'll mess with your mobile device and have it flash at you like a strobe light. I have tons of work I need you to do. It's all been piling up while you've been blankly sitting around like an idiot over the disappearance of that boy."

"…Because of that time in lazy mode, I've gotten rather used to it."

"Stick with it, Miss High School Student. You chose the path of school life, so how about you act a little more like an upperclassman?"

"…"

As if she had just been injected with energy from an outside source, Kumokawa sat up on the sofa, grabbed her headband, and swept back her bangs that were covering her face.

Her forehead glittered, she moved her hands complexly, and she took a pose like she was firing a handgun.

"Kumokawa Seria, the Super JK Tactician bossed around by the board of directors, is here!! I'll dull the judgment of any pure boy☆!"

After nailing it all perfectly, Kumokawa's shoulders drooped, and she wordlessly fell back down onto the sofa.

"…I can't do it. It just feels so empty. I'm not that #5, so I can't do things like that. Right now, I could sneak into a ballroom dancing class for middle-aged women and no one would notice."

"Just put on some clothes."

While still lying on the sofa, she tried to grab the mobile device from the floor using her toes, but her big toe hit it, sending it over to a corner of the room.

"…I just want to sleep for three days straight."

"Recall how thankful you are for your position. The brain of the board of directors is not a job you can get just by wanting it."

"Vwahh…"

As she let out that odd yawn, Kumokawa sat down on the sofa. As she could still speak through it, she seemed to have no intention of picking up the mobile device.

"What do you want me to do? I'm the person who couldn't even save one boy from that war in Russia."

"At the end of that war, we could not even control things within Academy City, so don't sulk over that. At school, you're the upperclassman who can silence a crying child, right? If you are going to resume your connection with that boy, you need to stop being so lazy."

"That would just be overreaching," Kumokawa said halfheartedly as she grabbed an almond chocolate from a package lying on one end of the sofa. "I stopped the tragedies that I could stop, but in the end, that's all it was. I could not stop the tragedies I could not stop. …For example, I knew that 20,000 military clones were being used up in those experiments, but in the end, I was unable to do anything about it."

She bit into the crunchy piece of chocolate she had thrown into her mouth.

"That's how it was last time, that's how it was this time, and that's how it will be next time. …I was just thinking through all that again. In the end, what am I doing? What meaning is there in having influence that is only enough to realize you can only give up because you cannot stop the tragedy?"

"So that is why you are worried about that boy who charges into the flames even though it is hopeless, who jumps straight over those desktop theories and manages to save those we could not."

Kumokawa fell silent upon hearing the old man's words.

With chocolates rolling in her hand, Kumokawa listened to the old man's further words.

"To be blunt, that problem will stick with us from here on, too. We may be one section of the board of directors, but we are also *only* one section. We cannot interfere with the projects wriggling in the deepest depths, and the

mysteries and darkness of the world do not exist solely within Academy City. We are simply too powerless against the threats that come from outside."

"…"

They had so much power, yet Kumokawa Seria and that old man had barely interfered with any of the incidents that boy had been involved in.

The path he walked on was just so dangerous and perilous, and Kumokawa and the old man did not have enough power.

Was it because they were just too smart? Or was it because they had power?

Kumokawa and the old man were restricted on various fronts, so they truly could not approach the core of the incidents.

"Being aware of your own powerlessness is a good thing, but we do not have time to wait for some slow character growth."

"Are you saying that this city has as many problems as ever even though the war is over?"

"Unfortunately, yes," the old man said to Kumokawa who was sighing in her underwear. "Just as there are problems we cannot deal with, there are problems a person like that boy cannot deal with. If you want to be able to feel proud of yourself, then carry out your role. That is what it is to be an upperclassman."

Part 4

After the short break, Leivinia Birdway began her lecture again.

"…Now 'hen."

She lisped slightly, most likely due to the aftereffects of the special super-spicy Cinderella on her lips.

"I have already explained magicians on an individual level. From here on, I will talk about groups of magicians."

"Are their groups something like Academy City?" asked Hamazura, but Birdway shook her head.

"For the Roman Catholic Church, maybe, but normal magic cabals work differently from your science side. For you, a large organization hands out a special power and manages it. With a magic cabal, people who already have special powers gather, forming a giant organization."

Index picked up the explanation from there.

“When they are related to legends and the occult, they tend to be viewed as religious organizations. Also, some religious organizations form magical organizations in secret.”

“That’s actually something I’ve been wondering about,” said Kamijou. “What exactly is the difference between the Christian Roman Catholic Church and a magic cabal like yours?”

“I could say there is no difference, but some people would get rather angry if I did,” Birdway finished. “When talking about the structure of the organization, the difference is probably that the former has all its individuals accepting that the interests of the parent organization come first while the latter is a gathering of people who have personal objectives from the beginning. But…”

“But?”

“The biggest difference is whether they are accepted by the majority or not. The major religions see all other sects as evil and oppress them.”

“Is that how it is…?”

“The general population is not properly aware of magic, but they do know of at least the morality within the legends and occult things at its base. It’s the same as how fairy tales tend to have morals in them. When those things have permeated the land, you are treated as a holy one, and when they have not, you are dealt with as one who must be eliminated.”

Birdway did not touch on the history of oppression like that.

The inquisition and witch hunts.

The Christian Church had originally managed to spread while being oppressed, but in later times, it had become the one oppressing others.

Given her field of research, those things were likely coming to mind.

“For example, modern Western magic cabals use something like secret tricks of the Christian Church. But if half the population of the world belonged to one of those cabals, it would become the greatest denomination of the church. And it wouldn’t even matter if there was a good argument against their techniques. …In reality, that would be incredibly difficult to pull off, but theoretically, that’s how it would work. That’s really all that separates an official technique from a secret trick. Of course, the current majority would never allow the possibility of a great turnaround like that to happen.”

“As I said, these groups are usually formed from people who already have power gathering together. The wishes of the individuals take precedence over the wishes of the whole.”

“…You refer to ‘them’ in the plural, so I’m guessing they’re a group,” Accelerator said, sounding annoyed. “If the rules of an organization will get in the way of their personal actions, why do they gather together?”

“From here on, I’ll only be talking about practical magic cabals,” Birdway said with a grin. “Oftentimes, they create a group because everyone around them is doing it. If things came down to a fight, a group would be stronger than an individual. Also, the division of roles is necessary to carry out larger ceremonies and gather information, so even strongly individualist magicians gather together in one place.”

“…So if a magician felt no need for the division of roles and felt that it would be more efficient to carry out his goal alone no matter how large it may be, he would not join an organization?” Kamijou muttered.

That world did not seem real to him because he was the kind of person who just halfheartedly decided to go to school or get a job “for now”. He wondered if they did not feel any unease at the thought of not belonging to any group.

Meanwhile, Hamazura said, “So it would be best to assume ‘they’ have a goal that cannot be realized without forming a group and distributing the roles, right?”

“Yes.” Birdway nodded. “Usually, this kind of hostile element stays hidden. Once their location is known, they will be surrounded by the majority. In other words, the smaller their organization, the better. The fewer the people involved, the less the chance that someone will reveal that kind of information.”

“So since ‘they’ have gone out of their way to recruit members, ‘they’ must have some goal that warrants the risks that brings?”

“That’s right,” Birdway responded halfheartedly. “I intend to speak to you in detail about ‘them’ later, but remember that if an organization is formed, there must be a reason. Within the highly secretive world of magic, information is gathered from small things like that. I want you to keep that in mind.”

Part 5

There were many different kinds of magicians.

For example, there were the members of Necessarius, the Anglican Church's special unit that was working to safely bring down Radiosonde Castle.

But that was not all.

The United Kingdom had a great number of magic cabals. Some of those worked for the country, some aimed to overthrow the country, some worked for the sake of their own leader, some worked for the benefit of all, and there were countless other types.

There was one cabal reserve army that had not become a true magic cabal.

By purposefully remaining at that low position, the organization managed to take action without restrictions.

Lessar, a magician girl from New Light, threw open the door of one of their hideouts (which was an apartment in Edinburgh rather than some eerie cave), and shouted at Lancis who was reading through an English newspaper.

"Did you hear, did you hear!? That boy was confirmed to be in Academy City!!"

"It was Bayloupe that intercepted the information from the Anglicans, right? And it seems he's with the Dawn-Colored Sunlight."

"That damn idiot!!" Lessar roughly threw herself onto the sofa, and swung her legs around despite wearing a miniskirt. "And after I seduced him so much in order to get him to join us for the sake of England!! Why did he have to go joining forces with a magic cabal that is in conflict with the Royal Family of all places!?"

While she yelled, Lessar grabbed at her clothes.

"He needs to be taught a lesson!! That's the only way!! Giving him treats didn't work, so I have no choice but to start swinging the whip!!"

Lessar forcefully threw away her clothes, and an outfit of black leather became visible underneath. The outfit gave off the distinctive smell and sound of real leather, and Lessar started swinging around a riding whip.

Out of exasperation, Lancis said, "…Where did you learn how to strip so fast? Since my body doesn't feel ticklish, you must not have used any magic power."

"That doesn't matter!! That bastard needs to know his place! I'll whip him until he awakens to a new world!!"

“How about we check on the enemy for now? We need to know who exactly is tempting that boy.”

“Let’s see… Oh, this is the photo intercepted from the Anglicans.”

Lessar glanced at the photograph lying on the table.

Kamijou Touma stood in the center of a number of people… but the angle was odd. The photo would have had to be taken from a position a few meters up in the air.

The photo had been given to the Anglican Church by Academy City and then intercepted by Lessar’s comrade, so some kind of scientific technology may have been involved.

However, that was not what bothered Lessar.

A few notes had been added in pen, likely by the Anglicans.

They said:

Kuroyoru Umidori <- Small.

Fremea Seivelun <- Small.

Leivinia Birdway <- Very small.

"…"

Lessar looked down at her body that was wrapped in a bondage outfit. She was short, but her chest size was not too bad.

The little devil girl that was Lessar suddenly paled.

"…Have that boy's tastes changed?"

Lessar then looked over at Lancis's unfortunate chest size as the other girl continued to read the English newspaper.

"Lancis!!"

"No."

"This is the time for your major debut, Lancis!! C'mon, put on this white Japanese school swimsuit and head to Academy City!! Who cares if it's November?!"

"If you say one more word, I'm punching you."

Part 6

Musujime Awaki sat at a table in a family restaurant, resting her head on her hand.

She stabbed a fork into a single salad that cost over 1000 yen and was in a completely different rank from an all-you-can-eat salad bar.

Another girl the same age as Musujime sat across from her with a bitter smile on her face.

"That's bad manners."

"I can't rest my elbow on the table even when I'm not using chopsticks?"

However, Musujime made no attempt to fix her manners.

The atmosphere was a languid one lacking in tension. She felt as if she did not know how to handle it.

The girl sitting in front of Musujime had been imprisoned within a secret underground area of Academy City's juvenile hall.

In order to save the other boys and girls imprisoned there, Musujime had carried out various dirty jobs as part of Academy City's darkness.

She had been a member of Group, a special organization for a select few.

At the end of World War III, those bonds had suddenly disappeared. She should have been glad, but there was still a bit of unease because she did not know why it had happened or what had caused it.

What should she do from now on?

Was there a risk of her actions affecting the situation negatively?

“Are you thinking through something difficult?”

“If it were something simple, I wouldn’t need to think about it.”

“How about you break apart the problem?” suggested the girl. “Most difficult things are just a complex intertwining of a lot of different things. I feel that it’s better to line up each of the little problems making it up one by one.”

“…True.”

It was best to resolve each thing in turn and then bring it all back together in the end.

The problem was that resolving each thing one by one might take over 100 years in her case.

But…

“Even if I’m going to be skipping some steps on the way up, it may be a good idea to at least measure the height of the staircase.”

Part 7

Fremea, the girl that the kotatsu had turned into a hot water bottle, woke up.

Hamazura Shiage was not nearby. The only people around were some strange foreigners wearing all black, an unknown spiky-haired boy, and a nun in a white habit.

Fremea continued to gather information through her unfocused eyes, but then she felt something on her forehead. As if she were a jiangshi or playing Indian poker, there was a memo stuck there. She read it, and learned that Hamazura had gone out to buy some drinks at a vending machine.

“Nyaohh…”

She let out that forlorn voice because she did not know anyone there besides Hamazura.

Also, they had been continuing on for so long on some difficult subject that it was nighttime, and she was exhausted from running around the city so much, so her focus and curiosity had gone below the zero line. She was simply not in a state where she could make the fine adjustments to her heart needed to match the topic of a conversation and lessen her distance with someone she was speaking with for the first time.

Fremea fell back and laid herself on the floor with her lower body still underneath the kotatsu. She saw Birdway's legs passing by, and she reached out for one of them.

"Stop that, you damn brat! I don't have time to deal with the likes of you!!"

Birdway spoke arrogantly, but she was holding a handheld game console in her hand.

"Mark!! There's new information on the walkthrough site. The speed of information in Academy City truly is something else. Hurry up and log in! Let's kick that lightning scrap beast's ass!!"

"I am not young enough to still have the kinetic vision needed for video games…"

"Niiyaa…" said Fremea in a feeble voice, but Birdway and the others headed out to the balcony where they could get a better wireless signal.

Fremea was caught in the vicious cycle of being tired and bored yet unable to sleep. She then reached her hand out for the next foot she saw passing by as if she were a cat reacting to a green foxtail.

The foot belonged to Accelerator.

"…Ahn?"

That situation could very well have been enough to make a back-alley delinquent wet himself, but Fremea did not properly recognize the threat level because her sleepiness was at its max and her sense of what was dangerous was below average in the first place.

"Nyaahh nyah nyah nyahh…" she said.

"…Don't look to me if you need support for your language faculty…"

Even then, Accelerator and his modern cane did not leave. Given that, he may have acquired a personality more decent than Birdway's.

"…Are you the person who saved me?" Fremea said.

"I'm not your hero," Accelerator spat out. "Your hero is the bastard who risked his life and actually took the full brunt of the danger. That title shouldn't be given to someone who just helped out a little."

“Nii…”

It seemed Fremea was so tired that she was not really listening to him.

“Even so, you still saved me,” she said sleepily.

“…”

“Funyahh…”

Fremea said that half in her sleep, and grabbed Accelerator’s leg.

As he looked down at the girl sleeping in the kotatsu, Accelerator thought.

I have no interest in being a villain, and I don’t think that I can become a good person. I’m at a halfway point where I’m not even sure which path I should walk down… but I guess even there, I can still interfere in someone’s life and help bring things to a positive conclusion…

Part 8

And on a road in Academy City at night, Last Order, a girl who looked about ten, cried out.

“Gyaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhh!! Misaka’s position was taken!! says Misaka as Misaka trembles due to an unexplainable sixth sense!!”

And upon receiving massive interference from the Misaka Network, Misaka Worst let out a meaningless cry next to the small girl.

“Gyaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhh!! Misaka doesn’t care about him, so why!?”

Part 9

After each of their breaks were over, Birdway’s explanation time began again.

“I’ve more or less finished explaining magic cabals and other groups of magicians, but there is one other major thing I need to explain before talking about ‘them’.”

“…There’s more?” complained Hamazura who was bad at listening to things like a principal’s speech.

Birdway ignored him.

“Before we talk about ‘them’, we have to talk about the details of what produced ‘them’. The foundation they came from is a real pain.”

“The foundation?” asked Accelerator.

Birdway waved a small finger at him.

“Yes, but I have no intention of giving a long lecture on the myths and legends. …Well, you could say it was a folklore-class emergency, but at the very least, you should be more familiar with it than occult legends.”

“This roundabout means of explaining things isn’t helping. Just get to the point.”

“I am talking about World War III,” Birdway said simply.

Kamijou Touma, Accelerator, and Hamazura Shiage’s movements stiffened a bit.

They had all taken part in a deep portion of that war.

“…That war was not just a clash between two nations using scientific technology. A conflict in a larger frame existed at the deepest portion of that war,” Birdway explained. “In other words, it was magic vs. science.”

Accelerator frowned upon hearing that.

“So ‘they’ are related to the other side that started that war?”

“…Yes.” Birdway grinned. “During World War III, ‘they’ rose to the surface. As such, I first need to explain what kind of war World War III truly was and what was going on at the deepest, darkest depths of the war, don’t I?”

Part 10

It apparently was going to be a long story, so they would need drinks and snacks on hand. The three of them headed to either the room’s kitchen space or a nearby convenience store.

During that time, Kamijou opened the door to the unit bathroom and went inside.

However, he was not planning on taking a shower. He was holding a sandwich and a bottle of water that he had bought at the convenience store.

That area was not suited for eating, but he was not planning on eating the food.

There was a girl inside.

"…So you'll even politely give me food."

She was Kuroyoru Umidori.

The girl of about twelve was one of the Freshmen from Academy City's dark side. Her arms and legs were restrained. No special devices or ropes were used. Kuroyoru had already been wearing a punk outfit with plenty of leather and studs. Due to the strings weaved around her arms and legs, her outfit could be made to function as a straightjacket with a bit of modification to how the strings were tied.

She used a power called Bomber Lance that allowed her to produce nitrogen spears from her palms, but her arms were crossed to prevent her from doing so. If she produced a spear, she would only be injuring her own upper body.

Kamijou said, "No, I don't think I'm the only one that's worried about you. They're finding it hard to face you because you just had a fight, is all."

What had actually occurred was well beyond the level of a mere fight, but Kamijou had no way of knowing that since he had shown up partway through.

Kuroyoru smiled cynically while restrained.

"…I am a cyborg. My insides haven't been messed with too much, but I can still manipulate the signals within my body to bring about a state of suspended animation on a cellular level. I can mess with my metabolism, so I can go without water for an entire week."

"If it involves messing with your metabolism, then that means you can't just go without eating."

"Tch," Kuroyoru clicked her tongue. "Listen up, you naïve bastard. I'm one of the Freshmen, the new darkness of this city. I'm the kind of person that targeted Fremea Seivelun's life just to form a line between Accelerator and Hamazura Shiage and then kill them. I'd prefer you being a little more nervous about being near me."

"I see…" Kamijou muttered.

That was the first he had heard of that general situation, so he took control of his feelings once more.

And then…

"But that's no reason to get in a fight with me, right?"

"…"

For an instant, Kuroyoru felt he was right, but then she frantically shook her head.

“No, no, no!! You’re the one that truly got in the way at the end!! You delivered the final blow! You directly affected the outcome, so you’re a clear enemy!! You’re the kind of person I should have a grudge against!! You have guts to show up before me. Didn’t you think I might just chop you to pieces!?”

“How?”

“…In the darkness I live in, there is a term called cyborg therapy,” said Kuroyoru with a smile. “Whether it’s victory over an illness, the raising of one’s physical abilities, or a correction of one’s personal appearance, the people who wish to be cyborgs have a defect or perceived inferiority in mind. Of course, those with any shame are not going to write whatever it is down on their order form, but you can still peer into the depths of that person by seeing what it is they’re trying to get across in a roundabout way.”

“?”

“For me, it was my arms. I only have two, and my power can only be emitted from my palms. I knew that having more points to emit it from would be better, so I branded myself with the stigma of having only two arms.” Kuroyoru Umidori shook her restrained body as she spoke. “As such, even though I am a cyborg, I did not have my entire body altered. What was done to me was centered on my arms, the shoulder blades that support them, and the connectors in various places on my upper body. My lower body is relatively untouched; after all, there was no reason to do anything to it.”

Kamijou heard an odd noise.

It was an oddly hard and metallic noise for something that was coming from a human body.

“Do you still not fucking understand?”

Her tone of voice changed.

“If my arms are in the damn way because they’re restrained, then I can just remove them!!”

With another metallic noise, Kuroyoru’s left arm came undone at the shoulder.

This was not just the shoulder being dislocated.

The entire left arm came off like a doll’s arm.

She swung around the left arm like nunchuks while it was held together by the long glove. Kuroyoru Umidori then turned her now-freed right arm towards the center of Kamijou's face.

She was using Bomber Lance.

She had said that she had a reason to turn that power on him, but she was also the kind of person that would not hesitate to do so even without a reason.

After all…

"You're taking villains too fucking lightly!!"

With an explosive noise, a spear made of nitrogen shot out.

That spear held destructive power that could pierce straight through composite armor, much less a human skull.

And Kamijou's reaction to that impending death was…

"Yes, yes, and here's Imagine Breaker."

"W-what!?"

Kuroyoru stared in astonishment as her very identity was blown away with a light wave of his right hand.

Meanwhile, Kamijou could not exactly turn a blind eye to what had happened.

"…So just tying you up isn't enough. Hmm… But you could be in danger if I can't prove that you can't resist."

"Wait, wait!! Don't just move the hell on!! Come to think of it, you were the one that did something to prevent me from killing Fremea, too, weren't you!?"

"Oh, I know. If you can freely take them off as a cyborg, I can just take off the other one. If you have no hands, you can't use your power."

"Wait, wait, wait, wait, wait- Ow!? You idiot! They don't just pop off like that!! How many damn locks do you think there are!? And even as a member of the darkness, confining a twelve-year-old kid in the bathroom and removing both her arms seems really fucking twisted to me!!"

"…Hey, the left arm isn't going back on."

"I'm not some old TV! You can't fix it in an analog way like that!! Ahh, stop grinding it in there! If you hit the connecter wrong, it sends noise through the nerves for pain!! Dammit, gimme that!!"

Kuroyoru grabbed her left arm back from Kamijou, and reconnected it using a special process.

Everything related to the connector was completely artificial, so there was no blood. Due to this, it didn't feel real to Kamijou and he looked her over interestedly.

"Being a cyborg sure seems convenient…"

"Do you know what the lifespan of precision equipment is? Think of a computer. If you have it at full operation 24/7, you'll be lucky if it lasts three years. Do you really want a body that requires surgery that often?"

But Kamijou was not really listening to what she was saying.

He ripped open the plastic wrapping around the sandwich.

"But as a cyborg, you can have gills like a fish added on and live underwater, right? Not just swim, but live there. There would literally be a wider world you could live in."

"…The issues of your cell's osmotic pressure and a lot of other minute things would have to be dealt with, so you'd probably have to thoroughly change your body for that."

"*Or you could put cat ears on your head* to gather auditory information from a wider range."

When she heard that, Kuroyoru's movements froze.

Immediately afterwards, she quickly backed up from him while still restrained.

"S-stop! What the hell are you imagining!?"

"?"

"I'm from the darkness!! I'm one of the Freshmen who have begun to hunt down the Graduates!! Don't be stupid! That isn't foreshadowing!! There isn't going to be some strange development where it turns out that I always wear my hood in order to hide cat ears!!"

Accelerator heard the commotion coming from the unit bathroom, and (in an exceedingly rare move for him) silently paled.

There was a certain common point between all villains and those in the darkness.

That was the fact that having their cool atmosphere ruined would end everything.

No matter how much of a villain someone was, if they were handed an apron and thrown into a kindergarten, they would have no choice but to look after the children.

Normally, the villain would protect their own world by using violence to eliminate those who would ruin that atmosphere of theirs, but that Level 0 had a strange right hand.

It was frightening to think of what would happen if one could not eliminate those that would ruin that atmosphere.

Kuroyoru Umidori had been implanted with the especially attack-oriented part of Accelerator's thoughts, so she was similar to a version of him that had headed down a different path.

If he failed, he would end up like that.

Accelerator had already deviated from villainy and darkness, but he swore in his heart that he would work to avoid being wrapped up in that kind of situation.

Between the Lines 2

She was not part of the blue Earth visible beyond the window.

In complete weightlessness, Kanzaki Kaori's black ponytail waved unnaturally, and she spoke into a spiritual communication item. As she was using that rather than a radio, she had to be speaking with someone magical rather than someone scientific like the people from the submarine or the rocket control center.

She had relied on the power of science for the launch.

However, the rest would fall under the realm of magic.

"I have finished connecting the designated spiritual item. Can you monitor things from there?"

"W-we can detect the signal. It does not seem that you made any mistake in the connection," responded a girl known as Itsuwa.

"There are sure to be some differences when using magic developed to be used on Earth. After all, they include the use of the cardinal directions and Earth's condition. I'll be careful here, but it should be easier for you to carefully monitor the subtle changes in the values. I would appreciate it if you would stay alert."

“We are constantly checking on the changes, including the effects of other heavenly bodies. Currently, nothing is outside the acceptable margin of error, including the power related to the tattva that flows from the sun and alters in elements by rotating around the Earth. As long as there isn’t a sudden flare causing a massive amount of solar wind, we estimate that there will be no errors that would hinder the mission.”

Of course, the science side had given them the records of solar wind and sunspots.

With the communications line still open, Kanzaki headed for the hatch of the spaceship. Instead of walking, she kicked off the wall and floated there.

Whenever she moved her body even slightly, a metallic clanking noise could be heard.

Due to the lack of gravity, she could not feel its weight, but Kanzaki was wearing something like the breastplate from Japanese-style armor. She also had some kind of jumbled-up device on her back that looked like a bunch of metal parts folded up.

If she were walking on Earth's surface, all of it would have weighed her down quite a bit.

As a Saint, she may have managed, but an average athlete would have been crushed.

However, if someone who specialized in researching space saw it, they may have frantically tried to stop Kanzaki. They would have said that heading “outside” with such light equipment was suicide.

It was not just an issue of breathing. Before one would suffocate, they would have to avoid quickly dying due to the issues with the pressure and temperature.

“Equipment check is complete. I am about to open the hatch and head out. There is still oxygen in the ship, but that does not matter, right?”

“There is a danger that the difference in pressure will damage some of the equipment in the ship, but it shouldn’t be a problem as that is just a disposable ship. But all of the air will move to leave the ship when you open the hatch, so be careful.”

“…If the spiritual item could be damaged by something like that, it would not be able to head out there or reenter the atmosphere.”

Kanzaki grabbed the hatch’s handle with one hand.

“If you leave it be, it seems the spaceship will reenter the atmosphere in half an hour and it will naturally burn up in reentry. The report said the reentry angle is set to annihilate the ship, so you don’t have to worry about it.”

“Understood. I’m going.”

“1000. Starting now. Good luck.”

After hearing that voice, Kanzaki unhesitatingly spun the handle.

After making three revolutions, a slight gap opened between the hatch and the wall. Immediately afterwards, the hatch itself was blown out into the pitch-black void. That propulsion was created by the remaining oxygen in the ship. The gas flowed in the direction with the least pressure.

But Kanzaki did not lose her balance.

The strangely shaped breastplate she was wearing automatically maintained her balance.

…In Japanese legend, stories about the heads of oni or nobles with a grudge flying through the air are not exactly rare.

Kanzaki thought while slowly heading “outside”.

There are also stories of swords that could pursue that kind of malignance. Well, those are just a few of the many stories of weapons that automatically fight, such as the ones from Norse or Celtic traditions.

She turned around, and could see the entirety of the spaceship she had been on. It was almost cone-shaped. The ship was more lead-colored than silver, and its basics were probably not too much different from those of a Cold War-era spaceship. However, the technology inside had been majorly changed.

The cone-shaped ship reflected a dazzling light.

It was being bathed in the sunlight.

Both the visible light and the invisible cosmic rays did not lose much energy there when compared to the surface surrounded in an atmosphere, so they could travel much farther. The area directly bathing in the sunlight had to have a surface temperature of nearly 400 degrees.

But there was no hint of pain on Kanzaki’s face.

If she was not protected from that kind of thing, she would not have even been alive.

Kanzaki was calm enough to appreciate the oddly near and clear moon and the sea of stars that could not be seen due to the atmosphere and the light sources on Earth.

“Are you having any problems?”

“Not currently. It’s just that this is my first extra-vehicular activity. I have a few backups set up in case of any unexpected situations, but please monitor my situation closely.”

As she spoke, Kanzaki looked down at her feet.

There was no sense of up or down there, but her stance was that of one looking down.

“…I can see the target.”

There were white clouds robbing the Earth of its blueness, but there was a giant cross-shaped structure that looked as if it were pushing aside those clouds. Due to its altitude, it was not affected by the atmosphere as much. As such, it seemed to have clearer borders than those of the great landmasses on the surface.

Kanzaki split off a bit of the magic power flowing through her entire body, and sent new magic power through the breastplate. She checked on the circulation, and then a change occurred in the breastplate.

The metal parts that were folded up on her back opened wide. It looked like steel angel wings and also like a Japanese sword in the way it displayed beauty in the slight curves amidst the sharpness.

“I am beginning my descent.”

“I will be monitoring your angle of reentry.”

“As long as I can safely make it into the atmosphere, I will be able to land on Radiosonde Castle,” Kanzaki said as she slowly moved toward her home planet.

Her speed slowly but surely increased.

“After all, it would be hard to miss a target that huge.”

Chapter 3: Accepted One, but There is Unrest. *Lecture_Three.*

Part 1

"Christianity, the largest religious organization in the world, is divided between the old and new forms of Catholicism and Protestantism. And Catholicism is made up of three giant organizations," said Leivinia Birdway. "Namely, the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, and the Russian Orthodox Church."

Even if they did not know much about the occult, the names of those churches were in their textbooks. Those organizations were known worldwide at that level.

"There has been friction between them in various forms for some time, but the trigger was directly pulled by a conflict concerning a Roman Catholic nun named Orsola Aquinas."

The cat was cat-punching Fremea who was sitting on Hamazura's lap, but the blonde girl was too deep in sleep to respond.

"This Orsola had supposedly deciphered the unparalleled magician Crowley's grimoire, so the Roman Catholic Church acted to assassinate her in order to preserve their ruling position. The Anglican Church interfered and dealt with the problem by getting help from Academy City in secret. …Doing so clearly put them in an opposing position."

Not even Birdway who was explaining it knew the meaning behind being able to read that grimoire, but at the same time, she had no real desire to find out.

She knew all too well just how much a human mind would be contaminated by a grimoire related to Crowley and just how tragic an end a magician that read one would meet.

"Afterwards, the Roman Catholic Church attacked Academy City a few times, but they were stopped each time by an idiot with a special right hand. Well, each of those events still fanned the flames that led to war though."

Hearing it all explained in sequence like that made Kamijou realize again just how precarious the path he had walked was.

If he had failed during any one of those events, a great number of lives would have been lost. However, he could not help but feel resentment

toward himself over the fact that those incidents had eventually led to that war.

“At that time, the Roman Catholic Church felt that they were at a disadvantage, so they started negotiations with the Russian Orthodox Church. They managed to bring the negotiations to their favor by using the fear that Academy City and the science side would hold the balance of the world. And it became necessary for the Roman Catholic Church to bring the secret treasure hidden amongst them out to the center stage.”

Birdway then spoke the name of the ones who controlled an entire age behind the scenes.

“…God’s Right Seat. The true dark side of the Roman Catholic Church that has 2 billion believers.”

The term “true dark side” brought silence to that small room.

The science side and the magic side were structured differently, but were Accelerator and Hamazura Shiage able to imagine what the nature of that darkness was?

It may have been because the topic was the large war that involved both science and magic, because her 103,000 grimoires had no knowledge of God’s Right Seat, or because her consciousness had been taken over during the course of that conflict, but Index did not open her mouth to speak. Instead, Birdway continued.

“You most likely understand a portion of the situations they caused. There was the strange incident where most of Academy City’s residents fainted on September 30th. There was the crisis caused by rioting all over the world that was resolved in the end by turning the French city of Avignon into a sea of flames. And there was the incident where devastating damage was done to Academy City’s largest underground district, District 22. …All of those were a portion of the clash between God’s Right Seat and that Imagine Breaker. A few of them may have had some kind of ripple effect into your scientific darkness, causing some kind of incident.”

September 30th and District 22…?

Hamazura frowned as he compared that to the information he had seen on the news.

0930 and Avignon…?

A slight tension ran through Accelerator based on his experience in the darkness.

They had been affected by those great events that had shaken the world and in some cases had helped bring them to a resolution.

But all of those events that could be referred to as the ripples created by a large explosion had advanced without them knowing.

They learned anew just how deep and dark the area they were about to step into was.

"God's Right Seat…" Hamazura muttered. "Who the hell are they?"

"I called them the true dark side of the Roman Catholic Church, but they are not the same kind of darkness as soldiers like you. In fact, they are the kind of darkness that controls soldiers like that in secret."

"So they're like the board of directors?"

"They also enjoy using themselves as test subjects, so I get the feeling that they're a bit different from the higher ups of this city."

As Fremea was asleep and was not reacting, the cat got up on the kotatsu and headed over towards Birdway. But she grabbed the cat by the scruff of its neck, and tossed it towards Kamijou, its owner.

"Simply put, God's Right Seat is a group that tried to gain power on the same level as or an even higher level than the one and only God. Basically, in the Christian Church, you are stuck with your original sin until you die and undergo the final judgement, but there are precedents of exceptions, such as the Virgin Mary, where people had their original sin washed away while they were still alive. Achieving that by artificial means is the easy-to-understand goal of modern Western magic."

A goal.

Did Academy City of the science side that stood opposite the magic side have a goal like that?

While hearing about that other world, Accelerator's thoughts also remained on the world closer to him.

"For God's Right Seat, the Roman Catholic Church with its two billion believers was a convenient place for their research and remodeling. However, the Anglican Church, Academy City… and the idiot with the right hand binding the two organizations together were getting in their way by shaking the Roman Catholic Church which was their foundation. God's Right Seat caused a few incidents on a level that had an effect on the world before the war, but those were all either aimed at Academy City and the science side or were specifically targeting Imagine Breaker."

Those words made them shudder.

The reason that God's Right Seat sent out their soldiers was different from some clash between nations.

Whether it was a nation or an individual, they would send out the same overwhelming force against it as long as it opposed their objective.

"So are you saying that the truth behind World War III was this God's Right Seat bringing the fight to Academy City and England in order to maintain their rule?"

"No," Birdway immediately replied to Hamazura's question. "That war was removed from the wishes of God's Right Seat as a whole."

"?"

"While the plans of God's Right Seat as a whole were arrogant, they were still just using secret tricks within the rules of Christianity. Simply put, they took various actions within the framework of Christianity. It's possible that the members of God's Right Seat considered themselves pious Christians."

Birdway sounded as if she were somehow enjoying herself.

Perhaps it was because investigating the special mentality of those at the top of organizations like that was her specialty.

"But there was one member of God's Right Seat who was too extremist," Birdway said as she watched the cat curl up on Kamijou's lap.

"His ideas went beyond the rules of Christianity. The Roman Catholic Church did not originally want to start such a large-scale war. With 2 billion believers spread out across the world, a global war could easily lead to them destroying their own land. …Yet this person gave his own objective priority and caused that major war for reasons separate from the objectives of the Roman Catholic Church or God's Right Seat."

That was the source of it all.

God's Right Seat was twisted enough as it was, but they had been unable to stop that one person who was too much of an extremist even for them.

"Fiamma of the Right," Birdway said, speaking his name. "He was a man who possessed another right arm, one different from that idiot's."

Part 2

Itsuwa of the Amakusa Church was a maiden in love.

As such, even though Radiosonde Castle was floating at a great altitude and could cause damage on the scale of wiping out humanity at any moment, the knowledge of that boy's survival had a large effect on her mental state.

Itsuwa was analyzing various pieces of data in the main hall of St. George's Cathedral, but her efficiency had dropped below half of normal.

She was in a very good mood.

She could not focus on anything.

The information being created within her body vastly overshadowed the information that was entering from outside her body. So many opinions, thoughts, and ideas were bewilderingly flying back and forth in her head that she could not organize it all.

To put it simply, she was really losing her cool.

A tall man named Tatemiya Saiji who was the former substitute pontiff of the Amakusa Church could not ignore how she was acting, so he took action.

He lightly tossed a bamboo sword towards Itsuwa.

She timidly caught the bamboo sword with both hands.

"?"

"I'll help you optimize your thoughts using a fairly old method. I doubt you've had many opportunities to use one of these since we came to London. How about you try to come at me?" said Tatemiya with another bamboo sword resting on his shoulder.

"O-oh, but my proper weapon is a spear…" Itsuwa said in a quiet and hesitant voice as she held the bamboo sword forward with both hands.

Her stance alone was enough to stiffen the atmosphere of the area, so she had to be fairly skilled.

And then two blonde nuns who knew nothing of the Japanese spirit started pointing and whispering excitedly.

"L-look, Sister Lucia! I think a Japanese samurai battle is starting!!"

"A nun should not be cheering on a fight, Sister Angelene."

"I bet they're going to do a Shinken Shirahadori! That's where they go like this and catch it between their hands!!" said Angelene as she clapped her hands together above her head.

Hearing the girl getting excited, an odd sweat started coming from Tatemiya's face.

The Amakusa Church had evolved independently while matching the culture of Japan, so they of course knew all sorts of Eastern spells… but their techniques were specialized for real battles. He knew nothing of techniques like the Shinken Shirahadori that would definitely prove one to be a true master if they could pull them off, but they did not seem like techniques where proper situations would come up much.

However, he could not betray those pure and sparkling eyes.

Itsuwa whispered, "*U-umm, what are we, uhh, going to do?*"

"*…We have no choice.*"

Tatemiya tossed his bamboo sword aside, making him truly unarmed.

He then stared straight at Itsuwa and shouted out,

"Come, Itsuwa!! Let's show them an authentic bushido Shirahadori!"

"Ehh!? You're seriously going to do it!? This may be a bamboo sword, but you're not wearing any protection!!"

Likely due to Itsuwa's loud voice, more nuns that had not shown interest up to that point started to gather around, wondering what was going on. Before long, the large room was filled with a few hundred people. Kouyagi and Ushibuka who were also from the Amakusa Church joined in the crowd, grinning.

Itsuwa could no longer back down, and her shoulders lowered.

"I-I'll be going. How about on the count of three?"

"I don't need any signal like that! Just come at me!!"

"Th-three, two, one…"

Whap!!!!!

The sound of Itsuwa's bamboo sword sinking into Tatemiya's head resounded throughout the cathedral.

Everyone's movements stopped.

Itsuwa, the one who had gotten that clean hit in, stood speechless, her mouth opening and closing. Tatemiya had his hands awkwardly stopped above his head, making it clear to everyone there that he had not been able to react to the bamboo sword in time.

(I-I have to follow through for him…)

Due to the Japanese concept of living in disgrace, the refined Yamato Nadeshiko that was Itsuwa immediately had her thoughts turn to the gentlemen standing before her.

(If I don't, the former substitute pontiff will turn to pure-white ash!!)

"Th-that was just a practice run, right!? It doesn't count!!"

But Tatemiya merely wordlessly moved his lips to say, "Y-you idiot. That means we have to try it at least once more now, doesn't it!?"

However, what had been said could not be unsaid.

The second attempt began.

Whap!!!!!

The result Tatemiya Saiji was met with did not even need to be explained.

The former substitute pontiff seemed to be floating in the air due to his bowed legs and his weak knees, so it truly looked like he was going to turn to ash and be blown away by the wind that time.

(I-I-I have to do something!!)

Itsuwa had now lost her cool in multiple ways.

"I-it's because this is a bamboo sword, isn't it!? This weighs nothing like a real sword used in battle. It's just so light that you can't get your timing right!!"

"*…I-idiot. Itsuwa, you idiot!!*"

Just as Tatemiya was about to give some kind of rebuttal, his fellow Amakusa member, Kouyagi, spoke up.

"Then how about you use this imitation sword? It's made of forged steel, so its weight should be the same as a real Japanese sword. …And it makes up for its lack of a blade by being tougher than a real one."

"K-K-K-K-K-K-K-K-Kouyagi!! I know you're doing this on purpose!!"

Thud!!!!

The sound of something very serious happening to a skull resounded.

Tatemiya Saiji gave up all pretense of shame or reputation and writhed about while clutching his head. Itsuwa's inability to properly follow through had brought her confusion to its maximum.

"Ah wah wah wah wah wah wah wah wah wah wah!!" she exclaimed while frantically spinning her head around at high speed. "An imitation sword isn't good enough!! No one uses one of these in a real battle! It has to be a real sword! With a true Japanese sword, he could catch it every time, but there's nothing like that here in the cathedral, so nothing can be done about it!"

“Oh, but there is one. Here, use this Bateren[1]-Dedicated Kanemitsu Toushou.”

Tsushima, an Amakusa woman with fluffy blonde hair, handed something to Itsuwa with the best possible timing. Itsuwa trembled and looked over at Tatemiya Saiji.

In the girl's hands was a first-rate sword that had never shown up on the center stage of history.

It was a Japanese sword created to be used for Western magic.

It was also known as the Book Slicer, a name based on a legend of slicing a bound book of around 1000 pieces of Japanese paper in a single swing. And it could do that purely with the sharpness of its edge. Simply put, 1000 pieces of paper was at a level where not even a magnum bullet could pierce it. Also, adding magic power into it would activate its functions as a spiritual item while increasing its destructive power even further. What would happen if that was done?

"Ohh! It looks like it'll be the real thing this time! This time he'll catch it!!" said one of the nuns, her eyes sparkling.

Upon hearing that, Tatemiya quietly said, "*…I-I think we've taken this far enough. We've gone more than far enough to get an award for our efforts, so relax your arms there, Itsuwa…*"

"No." Itsuwa slid the sword from its scabbard, and seemed to be preparing herself. "I can't let any more shame be brought to you, Tatemiya-san. After spreading so much shame on you, it is my duty to at least decorate you with the perfect beauty. It is all fine as long as it ends on a high note."

"Th-this has gone well past the level of shame!! If I take that head-on, I could easily become a teaching aid for an anatomy class! If you insist on doing it, at least swing it a little softer and slower, so I ca—Ah!? Wait, is this one of those times where someone who feels cornered has an awakening to an ability beyond what they normally have!? O-okay, I need to grasp the talent hidden within me and do my best to become the new protagonist!!"

The fearsome sound of that excellent sword slicing through the air resounded.

What fate would that blade bring as it swung down?

Find out next time!!

Part 3

Accelerator stepped out onto the dorm's balcony.

Just as Leivinia Birdway had mentioned the name Fiamma of the Right, her cell phone had started to ring. Apparently, it was from her little sister Patricia, so explanation time had been temporarily suspended.

He looked beyond the railing.

The sun had completely set, bringing the city to total darkness. The scenery was well-suited to his original nature.

He turned around and leaned his back up against the railing while drinking a mass-produced can of coffee.

He was getting sick of just how wide the world was.

Academy City was not all there was to the world. That city did not control all of the mysterious happenings in the world. He had vaguely sensed that during the war, but he had never thought it was to that extent.

It was just one piece.

The fact that all those fights and all those deaths had been far from the true center of it all had stolen much more strength from Accelerator's core than he had expected.

He then heard a familiar voice.

It was not coming from within the room.

It was coming from the other side of the fireproof panel that divided that balcony from the neighboring room's.

"Hey. Are you feeling depressed because you've run across something even more stagnant just when you thought Academy City's darkness had been dismantled?"

"Tsuchimikado…" Accelerator said, sounding annoyed.

Just like Accelerator, Tsuchimikado Motoharu had once belonged to Group, a unit for the select few.

"What the hell are you doing here?"

"You should've done your research before entering that room. I live next door."

"Tch."

"Well, I've got a lot of free time now that Group is gone. You're the one that caused it, so at least make up for it by keeping me company for now."

Accelerator fell silent.

Finally, he opened his mouth to speak.

"How much do you know about the Freshmen?"

"Enough. I expected someone like them to show up."

Tsuchimikado leaned on the railing while smiling. How did he see the situation?

Did he feel that he had escaped from the darkness? Or did he feel that he had been robbed of it?

"…Unabara and Musujime are probably thankful, although they won't say it. They're probably rather bewildered right now, but that's how they'll end up once they figure out how they actually feel about the situation. Although I'm not sure if they'll just be able to leave alone the problems left dangling such as Aiwass and Dragon."

"Talking about those who aren't here won't help anything," Accelerator spat out. "…What about you?"

"Well," Tsuchimikado's smile receded just a bit. "To be honest, it's not really an issue of good or bad for me."

"…"

"Even with Academy City's darkness dismantled, I still have things left to do. After all, I'm not just a spy for the science side. I'm deeply related to the darkness of the territory you have just stepped one foot into, so I'll continue on the same as before. But I'll make sure to not sink as low as the Freshmen," said Tsuchimikado. "Whether it had any real effect or not, I'm thankful that you tried to help out me and the others around us."

Accelerator clicked his tongue.

Tsuchimikado smiled at that.

"I won't stop you from washing your feet of that darkness, but you need to establish your own stance. Transcending good and evil is not an excuse for becoming some indecisive bastard who doesn't choose either. It's a much more difficult path than simply relying on something easy to understand like good or evil."

Suddenly, Accelerator heard clamoring footsteps on the pathway towards the front of the dorm. Someone ignored the shouts to stop coming from the men wearing all black, and the front door was blown open.

"Is this the scene of the crime, you thieving cat!? says Misaka as Misaka charges in!!"

"Honey!! This Misaka came to swing a glass ashtray down on you during the infidelity investigation!!"

Just as those noisy shouts came flying their way, Tsuchimikado silently straightened up from the railing beyond the fireproof panel and retreated into his room.

“What the hell are those damn brats doing here…?” Accelerator muttered in annoyance as Misaka Worst approached him with a small brand-name paper bag hanging down from her left hand which was not in a cast.

“Heeeyyyy!! Misaka attacked a few Freshmen strongholds and found some fun optional parts! Let’s have some fun remodeling that cool narcissistic girl with these cat ears and cat paw gloves!!”

“Gyaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!?”

Misaka Worst looked pleased at hearing a scream coming from the unit bathroom, but then she saw the room’s owner, Kamijou Touma. With a puzzled look on her face, she hid behind Accelerator’s back.

“What the hell are you doing?”

“Misaka has a feeling that guy is dangerous…” she whispered. “He seems like he would freely act for the sake of all Misakas, but that kind of action is like denying the value of this Misaka unit’s existence, as she is a collection of the malice within the network…”

Meanwhile, Fremea and Birdway inside the room were looking at Last Order with suspicion. When she noticed the two of them getting excessively close to her…

“'So one of you is the enemy!!' says Misaka as Misaka gets desperate in order to secure her position!!”

“God damn, they’re annoying…” Accelerator muttered.

Part 4

Tsuchimikado Motoharu’s younger sister, Tsuchimikado Maika, sat formally atop a drum-shaped cleaning robot. It was nighttime and well past the time to be home from school as she headed smoothly down a walkway in Academy City.

A girl called out to Maika.

“Heyyy, Maika.”

“Oh, what is it, Kumokawa?”

While still seated formally atop it, Maika banged on the cleaning robot with her palm in order to cause a slight error, bringing it to a stop.

While she held complete control over that cleaning robot, a girl wearing a maid uniform stood next to her. She was Kumokawa Maria, a classmate with a moderate chest size and long black hair in ringlet curls.

But…

"…Your maid uniform is as shady-looking as ever. That kind should be left to the cafes in an electronics district."

"I have a different goal," said the girl as she played with the black ringlet curls in her hair.

She was wearing a miniskirt, a fluorescently colored corset, and a nameplate in the shape of a rabbit attached to her skirt, but she actually had some of the best grades at Ryouran Maid School.

"Unlike you, my goal is not to provide support for others."

"You've told me that countless times already."

"Luckily, I have what they call talent. And that holds true for Academy City's psychic powers development as well as for school and sports. …But then I hardly ever get into any real predicaments. Continuing on without taking any real damage is fine, but I'll be in trouble if I have no immunity to that kind of thing once I finally do end up in a truly bad predicament. That's why I need my pride to be damaged to a level where it will not break. Like serving those who are clearly inferior to me."

"Yes, yes, I've heard that already. Burp."

"…What's with you? And I was just getting to the good part." Kumokawa had a displeased look on her face. "But that was some excellent seasoning. I just had my pride damaged. That means my strength will rise again! How wonderful!!"

"Ugh, classmates who get all worked up on their own are such a pain."

"More importantly, Tsuchimikado…"

"What, Kumokawa?"

"You seemed overly excited before I called out to you. Did something happen?"

"I was utterly astonished because I saw a guy who I thought was dead suddenly appear before me."

"A suspenseful development!? Hmm, but if I interfere too splendidly, I will end up swelling up my pride right after managing to get it damaged… My talent can be such a problem."

“Sorry, but this person is my friend, you damn misunderstanding girl.”

“I see… I see!! Today is a day of strengthening concentrated on my pride!! Will I be able to handle all this good luck…!?”

“She’s not a sore loser, but she manages to be even more annoying,” muttered Maika in annoyance.

Her transcendent genius of a classmate, Kumokawa Maria, was once again taking applications for an incompetent and stupid master.

Part 5

The world could be divided into a few different groups.

Depending on the basis one used to divide things up, the coloration of the world map would change, but the following was one of the possible divisions.

There was the magic side which was an aggregation of the occult, mysterious, and miraculous things that had affected the world in various ways since ancient times.

There was the science side which had existed since ancient times but had only started to have its presence known in recent times when it began rapidly repainting the common knowledge of the world.

And there was a third side that was greatly affected by the other two but was not strongly aware of their existences. That was the normal side.

Until very recently, it could have been described as peaceful or quiet, but that had become more difficult due to World War III.

But while that war had left many scars behind, normal people had a strength that let them return to normal lives.

“My husband is away from home for his job, and my daughter is living in a dorm. I don’t like how empty the house seems, but it is nice not having to worry about when they’ll be getting back,” said a woman named Misaka Misuzu.

She was a wife and a mother of one child, but she was also a college student. After acquiring the abilities and rhythm required to function as a housewife, Misuzu had breached the exam barrier and headed back to the life of a student.

It was a November night, but the indoor pool of the fitness club was kept at a nice temperature.

Another woman was immersed in the water next to her.

“My husband has so many trips that it seems like he never actually settles down in the house, and that's kind of scary.”

She was Kamijou Shiina. By coincidence, she was also the mother of a single child and the wife of a husband who was away for his job.

Incidentally, their children were in Academy City giving off sparks. Their husbands were not from the shounen manga-like science side or magic side. Instead, they were from a different kind of “other side”, like something from a business magazine where they took part in a money game where they did not know who the other was. However, the wives who looked younger than their actual ages had nothing to do with that. What was important for them was to float in the water and carry out their anti-aging aerobic exercises.

Misuzu glanced down at the wristband-shaped equipment she had borrowed from the fitness club to see if she had reached her target level of exercise.

“But why did you all of a sudden come here today? You hadn’t been coming for a while now…”

“Yes, yes. Well, I was worried about something or rather… *Really, Touma-san suddenly went missing, and then I saw him at the edge of a report from Russia. And then when I asked Academy City about it, they wouldn’t give me a straight answer.* …and so I didn’t really have the energy to spare for any hobbies.”

Part of what she had said had been spoken quietly and quickly, so Misuzu had been unable to catch it, but she just put on a very Japanese vague smile in response.

Meanwhile, some kind of switch seemed to have gotten flipped within Shiina, and she continued to speak to herself.

“*And then today, Academy City suddenly contacts me to tell me he’s returned. And when I called them again to check on the situation, they wouldn’t tell me anything at all. Really, what is going on? This is because of Touya-san’s blood in his veins, isn’t it? Heh heh heh. Oh, dear. I think I might end up throwing a Blu-ray player at Touma-san as well. Heh heh heh heh heh.*”

Misuzu saw a frightening shadow start to appear behind that smiling figure, and she backed away.

There were fathers and children who had been thrust into the center of a fight that would decide the fate of the world without anyone knowing, but

the completely normal people who held those people's reins may have been a hidden element that could easily influence the history of mankind.

Part 6

“Fiamma of the Right.”

After a short break, Birdway started speaking again.

After everyone was focused on her again, she continued.

“He was the leader of God’s Right Seat, the true dark side of the Roman Catholic Church, but he was a heretic. Unlike the other members, he alone did not take actions within the category of Christianity.”

Kamijou’s expression stiffened slightly.

But there was something other than pure hostility in that expression.

“However, his strength was real. In the beginning, he had various restrictions in place, but he managed to rid himself of them during the confusion of the coup d’etat in England. After that, almost no one could stand up to him. Many different forces played a part in World War III such as Academy City, the Anglican Church, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Russian Orthodox Church, but Fiamma of the Right held such power that he could easily be added to that list.”

It was not an issue of nation vs. nation.

Those groups were alliances of multiple nations. And Fiamma of the Right’s name could be added alongside them.

Kamijou Touma recalled just how terrifying he had been.

Accelerator, the #1, imagined just how terrifying he must have been.

Hamazura Shiage, a mere thug, was not even able to imagine how terrifying he must have been.

“Basically, if Fiamma of the Right had been able to release 100% of the special power stored within his body, the world would have ended. That was why he controlled the Roman Catholic Church that feared him, joined forces with the Russian Orthodox Church, and fought Academy City and the Anglican Church… It was all for the sake of preparing the conditions needed to release the power that resided in his right arm. That is the truth behind World War III.”

A war that was brought about for the sake of a single right arm.

Accelerator and Hamazura Shiage fell silent while staring into the world of magic and seeing a massive supernatural power that was hidden behind a global war.

“What was this Fiamma bastard trying to do?” Hamazura finally asked.

“That is quite simple,” Birdway responded bluntly.

That war had been nothing more than one of the pieces he was using.

Birdway readily explained what was in the mind of the despot who had seen it that way.

“He wanted to correct the inequalities in the world. He wanted to stop a tragedy that had occurred due to multiple coincidences that each had such low odds of happening that they could easily be called miracles. He wanted to bring peace to the world. He wanted to make everyone happy. …His ideas themselves were not too unusual.”

“What do those things have to do with that war at all? He’s the one that started it, right?”

“For Fiamma, all that mattered was the completion of his right arm. He truly believed that it had enough power to save the entire world because, in a certain way, it truly was possible. …He may have become twisted in the fact that he had a power that could clearly save the world. *Even though there may have been other methods of saving the world, Fiamma could no longer see any but his own*.”

Professional bakers might think that an oven was necessary to make bread.

But it could actually be made in a rice cooker or a microwave oven. You had to go through some special procedures and it took some effort to make the specialized tools, but an oven was not absolutely necessary. But the professionals who had a thorough knowledge of the normal method would become unable to free themselves of their preconceptions and preconceived notions.

Fiamma of the Right had held the power to save the world as if it were normal ever since he had been born, so to him, that knowledge was on the same level as the knowledge that humans walked on two feet.

“It’s a shame he’s gone, really,” Birdway commented. “For one, because of Fiamma himself, but more importantly because studying him may have been useful in analyzing *that which is sleeping in an even deeper place*, but… well, complaining about someone who’s gone won’t help anything.”

“The war is over. The world did not change. We’re still in this world of inequalities, and we have the freedom to win or lose to equality. …I take it

Fiamma of the Right's plan was not realized in the end," Hamazura asked as if he were checking on things one by one.

Birdway smiled thinly.

"Yet peace did not come to the world like in some cheap RPG."

"?"

"That war was for the purpose of bringing power back to Fiamma of the Right's right arm, but he dragged his surroundings into it a little too much. His side alone was the Roman Catholic Church, the Russian Orthodox Church… and I guess the Russian army as a more normal military force. The enemy side was the Anglican Church and the troops of the science side with Academy City at the center. Those were the forces that came into direct conflict. If you added in the people who were caught up in it indirectly, you would probably find that the people who were completely unaffected by the war are in the minority. That holds true for the magic side, the science side, and even the normal people who are not a part of either."

"Just having Fiamma alone come to an understanding was not enough for everyone around him to sheathe their swords…" Kamijou said. "Very few people understood his objective. Even fewer agreed with him. And it did not really matter what Fiamma was after. Those helping Fiamma, those opposing him, those with no relation to him… everyone who took part in that war was doing so in order to carry out their own goals. So, as long as their goals have not been accomplished, some of them found that *the war ending would be a problem*."

Those who denied the end of the war.

Those who denied the new world.

Those who did not care if they caused a global tragedy as long as they could accomplish their own goals.

"You're saying that's…?"

"Yes, that is who 'they' are," Birdway said with a smile. "We've finally gotten to the true topic at hand. World War III brought about 'them'. In the dark places of the world, 'they' wield a power that most people do not understand."

Part 7

The hot water bottle girl Fremea stirred.

She had been sleeping while sitting in Hamazura's lap with her lower body underneath the kotatsu, but she seemed to have woken up when Hamazura tried to move in order to head out to a nearby convenience store.

Fremea must have sensed that Hamazura was going to go out, because she grabbed his clothes with her small hand.

"Nyaaa…"

"I don't know if you're just half-asleep or what, but I can't understand you unless you use your abilities in the field of language to their fullest."

"Nothing to do… Bored… Stay here, Hamazura…"

"When you stay here for too long, my legs go to sleep."

"My spot."

Fremea seemed to have no intention of moving.

Suddenly, Hamazura heard some kind of commotion coming from the front door of the dorm.

"Mh? I think I just heard Hamazura's voice from in here," said a girl's voice.

And then someone turned the doorknob without even bothering to ring the doorbell despite it being a stranger's dorm.

"Hamazura, are you he—"

Takitsubo Rikou, a girl in a pink track suit, trailed off and froze in place.

She had seen it.

Her boyfriend, Hamazura Shiage, had some strange little blonde girl sitting on his lap. That special position would make one the envy of the world's gentlemen, but if you actually carried it out with someone you were meeting for the first time, you would definitely be violating various laws and regulations. Seeing that situation, Takitsubo's sleepy eyes opened wide.

She then started crushing the front door's doorknob in her grip with an expressionless face.

"…Hamazura, what are you doing…?"

"There's something wrong with those creaking and cracking sound effects!! I didn't think you were this kind of character!! This isn't Mugino in that special makeup again, is it!?"

He said that, but Takitsubo Rikou was a valorous girl who had wandered through Academy City's darkness while the Body Crystal had been eating away at her. She may have just not normally brought her full strength to the

surface or she may have never had a chance to use it given the various side effects, so her strength may not have actually been lower than average.

“You suddenly disappeared during the day, and then I couldn’t contact you, and I spent so much time searching for you, and then I find you relaxing in some random room, and you’re even in a kotatsu flirting with a girl that has a familiar-looking face…”

“Eh? This doesn’t count as cheating, right!? This age difference is just out of the question!! And just so you know, I’m all about the big ones, so don’t worry, Takitsubo!!”

“…Kinuhata always says you’re super Hamazura-y, but I’m a little disappointed that it’s at the level of a wild beast…”

Fremea had just been about to fall into the world of dreams, so she started speaking in order to quiet Takitsubo despite not knowing what they were talking about.

“Fgyaah. Don’t say bad things about Hamazura. In the first place he may look hopeless, but he’s the person who risked his life and saved me when it came down to it. …Mumble mumble…”

Hearing that, Takitsubo expressionlessly bent the side of the door she was holding.

“*No one* knows that better than me!!”

“Wait, Takitsubo!! She’s just a kid!!” Hamazura frantically called out to his girlfriend who seemed like she was about to rip the metal door out and repeatedly beat them with it.

Then new assassins arrived.

Kinuhata Saiai and Mugino Shizuri stepped into the room as if they were pushing Takitsubo out of the way.

“Tch!! Takitsubo-san super contacted him first!! But if I’m not last, I can still avoid being a humiliating bunny!!”

“You fool!! That kind of idiosyncrasy is your department, right, Kinuhata!?”

As the two of them yelled back and forth, they charged toward Hamazura. It seemed that whoever touched him first would be the winner.

From their current positions, it looked like Kinuhata would be faster by just a bit, but…

“My legs are longer!!”

Mugino’s spear-like kick mercilessly struck Hamazura’s face.

“Bwah!?”

Mugino ignored her target’s ridiculous shout and made a triumphant pose.

“Okay!! Punishment avoided!!”

“You have to be kidding me… This humiliation that’s on a level where it’ll remain in the history books has super fallen to me!?”

Mugino and Kinuhata started shouting at each other again, seemingly not noticing Fremea who was still sitting on Hamazura’s lap. Most likely, their spirits would drop by quite a bit in a few dozen seconds.

Before that could happen, Takitsubo asked a question with a puzzled expression.

“Huh…? You had to touch him?”

Mugino and Kinuhata both spun around.

It was clear who was going to have to undergo the punishment.

Part 8

And the problematic time came.

Probably because Hamazura had moved quite a bit when he received that kick to the face, Fremea Seivelun awoke from sleeping on his lap.

When her gaze met Mugino’s, Mugino instinctively took a step backwards.

After all, a little girl who looked exactly like Frenda was looking at her!!

“A ghost!? Has Academy City’s analysis of the human body entered that realm!?”

“She sure is making herself look super young for a dead girl!! …Hm? By any super chance, is this the girl that #1 mentioned…?”

“…Nyah…”

Fremea must have still been half-asleep, because she rubbed at her eyes.

Hamazura pressed up against his nose and said, “…Ow ow ow ow. Th-that’s right. Her name is Fremea Seivelun. It seems she’s Frenda’s little sister.”

Fremea seemed to notice that her name had been spoken, so she looked around with vacant eyes.

Hamazura felt that he had to introduce the others to Fremea now that he had introduced her to them.

“Oh, Fremea. This person is named Mugino Shizuri, and she…”

After getting that far, a question came to his mind.

How was he supposed to explain it?

An unpleasant sweat started pouring from his back.

He couldn’t exactly say that she was the lady who got pissed and chopped her sister in half. But he also felt that it was too much to just gloss it over altogether and say Mugino was a wonderful partner for Fremea since they had both escaped from the darkness of Academy City.

While Hamazura remained frozen in place, Mugino casually spoke.

“I’m the girl who killed your sister. Nice to meet you.”

“Heeeeeeyyyyy!!” Hamazura yelled out, and moved Fremea from his lap and to the side.

He then tried to grab Mugino’s arm and move her to the edge of the room, but she instead got him into a joint lock. As he yelled in pain, he somehow managed to get a bit away from Fremea.

It seemed that Fremea had still been half-asleep and hadn’t understood what Mugino had said.

“*…What the hell are you saying, Mugino-san!? That’s too fast!! You can’t just come out to her that fast!! Why did you become so frank and open all of a sudden!?*”

“I came clean.”

“*That isn’t exactly something to be proud of here!! Oh, no. Fremea’s looking this way. I’ll go say something to fool her, so just don’t make this situation any more complicated than it already is!!*”

With vacant eyes, Fremea started chewing on a three-dimensional puzzle, and Hamazura had to tell her that it wasn’t an apple. Mugino started watching them, but then she realized that a new form had entered the room.

It was Accelerator who had returned from the convenience store with a can of coffee.

“#1, huh?”

“I have no interest in those good-mannered rankings. Actually, why the hell are you even here?”

If it was between normal people, the conversation may have simply disappeared amongst the mundane noises of the city, but with those two, it was different. Just a few words from them sliced through the atmosphere of that room.

Mugino continued without really changing her expression.

“I happened to run into a relative of a girl I killed a while back. I told her about it, but it doesn’t look like it got across to her.”

“…”

“Since I’ve been deeply involved with the darkness, the odds of Anti-Skill arresting me or being put on trial are more or less zero. …As such, I felt that this was the only way for me to make up for my crime.”

“If you want to just whitewash over it like that, fine. But if doing so drags another person into the darkness, you have your priorities backwards.”

“Then I’ll make sure that doesn’t happen. And I’ll use whatever means it takes. I have no intention to rely solely on what is good.”

That was the extent of the conversation.

#1 and #4. That single-room dorm was not exactly big, but they clearly took different paths.

Part 9

In order to allow things to move ahead smoothly, Hamazura decided to have the members of Item kill some time outside.

As such, he pushed their backs while begging them to leave.

“Get out! Just get out! The bunny? I’ll make sure to see that. You can count on it!! I won’t let that slide. In fact, I’ll have all of you be bunnies!!”

As a result, they all scattered off with truly displeased looks on their faces (including his supposed girlfriend Takitsubo).

When Hamazura returned to the kotatsu, Birdway got to the core of the topic at hand.

It began with a question from Accelerator.

“So, what exactly are ‘they’?”

Everything they had discussed up until then was collected there.

In order to explain it, a lot of preliminary explanations had been necessary.

“Academy City, the Anglican Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Russian Orthodox Church, and all the other forces that got wrapped up in that conflict were merely groups that had a part in that war. As an organization that was created due to World War III, ‘they’ are a different type altogether.”

Kamijou and Hamazura listened to Accelerator’s words.

“Where did ‘they’ come from?”

And then the #1 asked another simple question:

“Actually, what is ‘their’ name?”

“Well,” Birdway said, and paused for a second before continuing. “Let me warn you first. Most likely, the answer as to what ‘they’ had to do with World War III will probably betray your expectations.”

“Are you still planning on evading my question?”

“No, I won’t do that. It’s just that a lot of preparations are needed before we get to the backbone of the matter. However, that would be rather painful for you, so let’s leave the backbone aside for now and just start with ‘their’ name.”

“…”

“‘Their’ name is exceedingly simple as it denotes what ‘they’ are in this world. If it was too difficult to understand and didn’t convey anything to anyone, it would be meaningless,” said Birdway smoothly. “Yes. ‘Their’ name is…”

Between the Lines 3

Kanzaki Kaori’s feet touched down on the upper surface of the giant structure.

It was Radiosonde Castle.

Its altitude was so great that there was nothing even remotely like clouds near it. Both above it and below it was a color halfway in between indigo and black. Much farther down, the familiar blue could be glimpsed.

The surface below her feet felt similar to stone. Radiosonde Castle was in the form of a giant cross and appeared to be made up of a jumbled assembly of multiple churches and temples. The styles of construction were all different, but the level of damage to the stones was all even. Everything was new.

Simply put, it seemed that a single type of material had been built up into that giant shape in order to look like it had been created from a collection of churches and temples from around the world.

“I have landed!! I am about to head down to the lowest level of Radiosonde Castle and begin interfering with the balloons as needed. Help me with the values and calculations!!”

Agnese’s voice immediately reached Kanzaki’s ear.

“Understood. Depending on its rate of descent, we will choose one of two target areas for it to fall either into the Indian Ocean or in the Pacific Ocean. First destroy just one of the balloons so we can determine just how much of its lift it'll lose. With some definite values from that, we can calculate a method from there.”

On the bottom of Radiosonde Castle were over 200 giant metal balloons. It was unlikely that destroying just one would cause the entire structure to suddenly fall.

Whether it was from the magic side or the science side, she had not yet noticed anyone onboard.

(…When I landed, I was not obstructed by any magic or anti-aircraft weaponry.)

However, she could not be sure, as Radiosonde Castle was simply too large. It was possible that some personnel were hidden elsewhere and they may have simply not used any magic or guns to intercept her.

She simply could not tell what they were thinking even after actually setting foot on that giant facility.

That made Kanzaki feel uneasy.

The staircase was similar to scaffolding at a construction site, but the actual materials making it up were the same as the rest of the temple's. It looked as if the walls had been twisted and forcibly made into stairs like a sugar sculpture.

“…We only have the records from long-distance observation to compare to, but it really does seem to be imitating the Star of Bethlehem.”

“That served the function of modifying the flow of power on a global scale, so it was essentially a giant switching device. So is this one the same…?”

“But I can’t discern any goals which would make sense for that. Really, it feels like a transformer with no electricity flowing through it. I can’t imagine what important reason this thing could have.”

“If its purpose isn't to float up there, maybe it's to be dropped on something?”

“Unless they just want the end of the world or something, I don’t think anyone would want that kind of indiscriminate destruction.”

Whether it was meant to float up there or drop down, she could not find any logical aim.

Of course, making a structure that large fly would require massive costs to prepare, carry out, and maintain.

That fact gave Kanzaki a bad feeling.

The small fact that she could not see what they were after invited in a great unease. It made her think that she was making a major misunderstanding.

“…I’ve arrived at the lowest level.”

Kanzaki forcibly cut off her negative thoughts and focused on the situation in front of her.

The ceiling above was made of thick stone, and the blue sky could be seen far below her feet. Scenery she could never have seen on the surface spread out below her. The place she was standing in truly did seem to be based on construction scaffolding. She was on a passageway made of a narrow mesh that was hanging down from the stone ceiling.

It was similar to construction scaffolding in its form, but it was made of stone. Also, it did not seem like the people that had built it were thinking of safety standards at all. Kanzaki looked around while constantly paying attention to her footing.

She saw giant spherical tanks that were a few dozen meters across.

They were hanging down like fruit from the giant stone structure that was a few dozen kilometers across. As there was nothing else to compare their size to, the scene messed with her sense of scale.

“The method it uses to float is still unknown. If it does use some kind of gas, you need to keep in mind the possibility that it is flammable.”

“The balloons themselves are large, but Radiosonde Castle is simply so huge that there is little risk of other balloons exploding if a flammable gas in one explodes.” Kanzaki calmly analyzed the situation. “In fact, what would get caught up in the blast would be the scaffolding around the balloons. I would like to avoid leaving before all the work is done.”

The metal balloons and the scaffolding were both hanging down from the giant stone structure above her head. She had no idea how far its effects

would spread if an explosion did occur. It was even possible that the stone structure that seemed to cover the sky would separate, sending her crashing down.

Kanzaki made sure that she had a straight path to the nearest staircase up to a higher level, and reached for the sword hanging from her waist.

Technically, she was reaching for the seven thin wires stored on the sword's scabbard.

"I'm beginning. What is below me?"

"You are around the center of Eurasia. The area is complete wilderness. There are no civilian, military, or magical facilities there. We have received permission from the Russian Orthodox Church."

"Then here goes."

Immediately after Kanzaki said that…

Nanasen.

A flash of light was emitted from the space between the scabbard and the sword's hilt. Immediately afterwards, the scaffolding between Kanzaki and the metal balloon was sliced to pieces. The destruction stretched all the way to the metal balloon.

There were no sparks.

That quick slicing attack that used many wires sliced through everything before her like it was clay.

However, the massive amount of wreckage fell in a distinctive way.

It was different from being blown by a strong wind in a single direction.

The countless pieces of wreckage were blown in all directions, with the spot the metal balloon had been in at the center.

"It seems that it truly was filled with something like a gas. However, I do not know if that alone is providing the lift it—"

She trailed off because the scaffolding below her feet wobbled slightly.

It sank down about 10 cm.

But Kanzaki sensed it as an instability like a suspension bridge having the wires supporting it snapped one by one.

"The destruction of the balloon has caused a change in Radiosonde Castle's altitude. We have been able to determine the specs of each individual balloon due to that. It seems that the gas in the tanks is indeed what is providing the lift. I will be sending you the procedure with which to remove

the gas. The work itself is simple, but given the scale of the fortress, you cannot waste any time."

A few diagrams and values floated up in Kanzaki's mind. There were no major differences from what she had been guessing. The only real difference was that the time limit was rather harsh.

"So instead of just destroying them, I will be opening a hole in the balloons to remove the gas gradually?"

"If you destroy them too much in a flashy way and the rate of descent increases more than expected, we will have no way to fix the problem."

Kanzaki circled around, avoiding the scaffolding she had destroyed, as she ran along the lowest level. Radiosonde Castle was a few dozen kilometers long, but Kanzaki used her abilities as a Saint to run faster than the speed of sound.

"…Time for the first one," Kanzaki muttered when she arrived next to one of the giant metal balloons a few dozen meters across.

That one would be the test case to see if the theorized method would actually work. The situation could change greatly depending on whether she succeeded there.

"First, you need to greatly reinforce the side of the balloon. If you just opened up a hole now, the gas flowing out would force the hole wider."

"So it's like putting tape on a normal balloon and then stabbing a pin through it. It will also be perfect for installing a spiritual item that will act as a valve."

"The balloon's estimated strength is on the level of 30 mm of steel. We think that they were made intentionally fragile so that a ballistic missile would have immediately and catastrophically brought it down. You need to open a hole about 13 mm across, but don't go through it all at once. Be careful and take at least 100 seconds."

"Yes, the Japanese love our stories about water dripping down from a stalactite and wearing down the bedrock. We have plenty of spells to go along with that."

If one ignored the special examples like Saints such as Kanzaki, magic had nothing to do with talent and was in fact usually developed to be used by those with no talent. It seemed a lot of her predecessors had felt that magic was more suited to deliver slow and steady results piling up on each other rather than to bring out some great phenomenon all at once.

Kanzaki pressed a piece of paper against the side of the balloon, and it stuck there like a wet cloth. She then added many more. Before long, armor 3 meters square and 5 cm thick was covering the side of the balloon.

"…The Japanese really like those paper walls, don't they? They can stop blades and bullets."

"The idea is not all too rare. In places like China, armor was made of bundles of paper. Well, it was something like covering your entire body in phone books, so it was not very lightweight."

On top of that wall of paper, Kanzaki attached a device made of a few wooden sticks that were bound by cotton strings. It looked a bit like the compasses used by ancient scholars and a bit like tools used to dig wells.

"As this one is a test, I will watch it all the way through to the end, but there is nothing for me to do while it digs through it. There would normally be no reason for me to stick around and watch. Once I confirm that this one succeeds, I will leave the rest at this point and head for the next balloon. That will save a lot of time."

Just in case the balloon burst, she kept her distance and made sure she had a path to an ascending staircase planned. Kanzaki then sent magic power through the digging spiritual item and gave the signal.

An unpleasant sound like a pencil being sharpened reached Kanzaki's ears.

"For now, there does not seem to be any danger of the balloon wall bursting."

"The hole has been confirmed… The expected amount of gas is being released. Radiosonde Castle's rate of descent has increased, if only by a little."

"Contact me if you detect any problems. By expanding the stake used to dig, I can seal the open hole."

As she spoke, Kanzaki jumped from scaffolding to scaffolding.

As she had announced, she did not stay to watch each and every metal balloon as the hole was being made. She set up the spiritual items and then headed towards the next balloon.

"The effects from the interference to the 70th balloon have been detected! Radiosonde Castle's altitude has fallen to 11,000 meters!! The atmospheric pressure countermeasure spell is under quite a bit of stress!"

"Where is it currently!? Should we drop it into the Indian Ocean or the Pacific Ocean!?"

“Radiosonde Castle is currently passing over Korea. The Pacific is the only option now!!”

She had destroyed the first balloon when it had been near the center of Eurasia.

Radiosonde Castle’s speed was much greater than Kanzaki had thought.

She hurried for the 71st balloon.

“Do you know where in the Pacific Ocean we are dropping it?”

“There is an area of ocean with a depth of 6000 meters 1700 kilometers north-northwest of America’s Midway Atoll.”

Kanzaki charted out the general route it would take from its current location to the next location.

(…It’s going to pass over Japan.)

Her face gradually paled.

(The route cuts straight over Academy City!?)

“Agnese, it’s an emergency!! Please calculate a method of interfering with Radiosonde Castle’s balloons that will take a more circuitous route!!”

“Hah?”

“Passing over Japan may be fine, but passing over that city is bad!! If Radiosonde Castle was constructed in order to be dropped on something, the target is likely-!!”

Suddenly, a tremendous amount of static assaulted Kanzaki’s ears. Immediately afterwards, the magical communications line created by the spiritual item was severed.

Someone had clearly magically jammed the magical signal.

(So they don’t want me saying anything unnecessary, hm?)

Radiosonde Castle simply slamming its entire giant form into the ground was not the only threat. If it disassembled into smaller parts and had those parts rain down on the surface, it could create damage on a large scale. It could carry out a large-scale bombing of Academy City while the main body was allowed to safely land due to the efforts of Kanzaki and the others.

That was the logical thing to do.

However, if the people behind the fortress were the type to give their own ideas precedence over what was to come, it was still possible they would just drop Radiosonde Castle directly on Academy City without thinking about what that would mean.

Magicians were beings that would do that kind of thing.

Kanzaki and the rest of Necessarius existed to stop that from happening.

(But that jamming came with such pinpoint timing. I doubt that they would have been able to do that if they were simply collecting information remotely. That means… some portion of the enemy is onboard this fortress which is going to be sent crashing down…)

Kanzaki heard an odd sound, and she took a defensive stance.

It was a high-pitched noise like a crystal glass being hit. It did not repeat just five or ten times. Instead, it continued irregularly for quite some time.

The source of the noise was…

"Above!?"

The moment Kanzaki realized that and jumped back, something fell on the spot she had been standing in an instant before.

It was not a human.

It was a cylinder made of heavy stone with a diameter of 55 cm and a height of about a meter.

The drum-like object moved around like it had a will of its own, and it turned to face Kanzaki.

Chapter 4: Invitation, and That Name is... *Lecture_Four (and_More).*

Part 1

"Mh?"

Just before Birdway was about to mention "their" name, she suddenly frowned.

Sounding annoyed, Accelerator said, "...You aren't going to put on an air of importance again, are you?"

"I have no reason to do that. ...But *this is now hardly the time to be sitting here discussing this*."

As Birdway spoke, she pulled her legs out from under the kotatsu and walked across the room. She was heading for the window connecting to the balcony.

"Is there something outside?" asked Kamijou. "Actually, this area has similar dorms lined up. The next dorm is only a few meters away, so you'll only be able to see a wall out that window."

"No, wait a second... If I go like this..."

Birdway went out on the balcony, and leaned out with her stomach on the railing. It seemed like she was staring beyond the gap between the buildings.

"Dammit... I was right," she said in almost a groan.

Those inside the room could see nothing outside other than that girl whose position put her skirt in a rather dangerous state.

"Is there something out there?" asked Hamazura.

Birdway finally got down from the railing, and stood on the balcony.

"'They' are here."

The three of them headed towards the balcony in shock. Kamijou tried to lean out on the balcony like Birdway had, but Accelerator kicked down the thin fireproof wall that divided the balconies between rooms.

They could now see it.

"Huh!? What the hell!?"

Hamazura was the first to yell out.

Academy City was overflowing with various lights at night, but the stars could still be seen. Something gigantic was obstructing their view of that faint light. Beyond the horizon was a huge construction of a scale never seen in real life. It was like a cumulonimbus cloud.

Birdway meaninglessly folded her narrow arms in front of her small chest.

"...I thought the science side would have brought it down at an earlier stage since Academy City was going to be dragged into this, but it seems that they were slower at dealing with this than I had anticipated. I guess the errors in his plan are having an effect."

"What did you just say?" Accelerator asked as he frowned at that line he couldn't just overlook.

Birdway nodded in an exceedingly arbitrary way.

"That thing was chasing after us from the beginning. ...Well, technically, it's chasing after that missing Imagine Breaker. That floating fortress with the mass of a dreadnought has been performing a worldwide search and following him around the clock. ...Shaking it off would have been a pain, y'know? And if we did, there was a danger of the Dawn-Colored Sunlight's trump card being analyzed. I decided that it was best to leave that troublesome thing to some troublesome people."

"So... what?" Hamazura's face paled. "Cumulonimbus clouds spread for dozens of kilometers. Are you saying that giant objet d'art is like a huge cloud made of concrete and it's going to fall on Academy City!? And you brought it here on purpose!?"

"Wait, I didn't hear anything about this!! That isn't the Star of Bethlehem, is it!?"

Even Kamijou was starting to panic, but Birdway remained completely calm. In fact, she seemed proud.

"Well, this boy was the one at the center of defeating Fiamma of the Right and ending World War III. As 'they' came about due to the war, they would want to know if he was still alive. But it takes quite a bit of effort to search the entire world. And 'they' also wanted to keep it a secret that anyone was chasing him. ...So they decided to hide a leaf in the forest. By creating a large-scale incident, they moved the world's focus to the catastrophic danger on a planetary level."

That incident was carried out in order to search for a single high school boy.

Those people were willing to risk the extinction of the human race for that purpose.

That was what magicians were.

They would use everything at their disposal for the sake of the individual while paying no heed to what it meant to the whole.

"What are we going to do...?" Kamijou groaned before he finally started shouting. "We know what they want, but we can't let them drop that asteroid-like fortress on Academy City!! How exactly are we supposed to stop them!?"

"...That's what I wanted to have Academy City do. There would have been plenty of methods while it was over the ocean, but now that it's over land, the wreckage would still fall down on the city."

"...You do have an idea, though, right?"

Kamijou shuddered, but it seemed that Birdway really wasn't stupid enough to not have a plan.

She said, "That search structure... um, I think the Anglican term was 'Radiosonde Castle'. Anyway, I have an idea as to how it is following Imagine Breaker. If we know how it works, we can use that to figure out a way to deal with it."

"So how does it work?" asked Hamazura.

Birdway meaninglessly stuck her index finger up and spun it around.

"Do you remember what I said about leylines?"

"...You said that they were one of the types of energy that could be used for magic other than the magic power created by humans. If I remember, they have to do with the Earth and its terrain," Accelerator said.

"That's right." Birdway nodded. "And Imagine Breaker negates all kinds of supernatural powers. And that includes the power circulated by the planet."

"So, his right hand is like a snowplow and that giant fortress is following the path he's created?"

"It's not that simple," Birdway responded to Accelerator's question with a sardonic grin. "Imagine Breaker works exceedingly well when it is normalizing abnormal values, but it does not show much power when dealing with something that is uniform from the start. It only carries out destruction of things that have already had their harmony taken. ...For example, he does not destroy someone's soul when he touches them, and he

does not destroy the planet when he touches it. Yet those things do indeed have supernatural power flowing through them."

"...Does it really work so conveniently like that?" asked Kamijou himself.

The boy looked down at his right hand, and Birdway continued speaking in an arrogant way.

"This isn't just limited to Imagine Breaker. Natural powers like yours are often initially set to conform to the environment or situation. And the natural Gemstones are people who received psychic powers via stimuli from the environment of Earth," she said in a simple manner. "To talk about the leylines... Oh, I know. I'll use the example of a snowplow you used. When Imagine Breaker scrapes away the accumulated snow, more snow quickly accumulates, preventing anyone from seeing the path. It would be more accurate to say that a cycle like that has been set up from the beginning than to say that it has to do with how much the planet can replenish the power."

"Then how the hell is that fortress tracking that Level 0?" asked Accelerator.

"'They' can't search for him normally, so 'they' set up a kind of trick."

"A trick? On the fortress?"

Kamijou looked puzzled, but Birdway's response was well beyond his expectation.

"No, on the planet."

"..."

The scale was so great that Kamijou's thoughts cut out.

But Birdway continued speaking regardless.

"The amount removed by Imagine Breaker is made to be naturally compensated for by the surroundings. 'They' have interfered with that cycle. They have made it so that a mark only Radiosonde Castle can detect will be left behind during the process of repairing the amount removed."

"How...?" asked Hamazura who still had not quite come to grips with the concept of magic. "Saying they interfered with the planet is simple enough, but how did they do it!?"

"They used feng shui. The locations of mountains and rivers change the flow of energy, so people build their palaces in the most suitable place based on that. ...Well, the opposite is also possible. If you want a certain change to occur to the energy of the leylines, you just have to systematically destroy the mountains and rivers."

It was easy to say.

For the sake of a single spell, the terrain had been blotted out somewhere on that planet. That was yet another result of the individual surpassing the whole. The magicians used everything at their disposal to carry out the goal before their eyes without giving any thought to what would come later.

Hamazura gulped.

"Would they... would they really go that far to find a single person...?"

"Compared to Radiosonde Castle, that is nothing more than a sub spell. How much energy do you think it takes to make a mass that huge float like that? Well, it's certainly not something you can pull off with gas turbines," Birdway said smoothly. "Let's get back to the topic at hand. In order to follow Imagine Breaker, 'they' have interfered with the system of the leylines running through this planet. Imagine Breaker destroys that energy, and their mark is automatically created in the process of the repairing cycle. It's like a potato or a jewel. Using that, Radiosonde Castle can accurately follow Imagine Breaker no matter where in the world he flees. Do you understand that much?"

"But that would mean there's no way to escape it!!" yelled Hamazura with his eyes wide, but Birdway was as calm as ever.

"'Their' spell may be hitching a ride on the cycle that repairs the lost power to the leylines, but it is not producing the mark at all times. 'They' have to think about the cost. It would be easiest if you just thought of it like transmitters set up at even intervals."

"..."

"Basically, they're automatically produced in the Earth at about every 50 kilometers. If Imagine Breaker is not in range, it heads for the next transmitter, but if he is in range, it is guided with even more detail. In other words..."

"...If we destroy the transmitter embedded in the ground, Radiosonde Castle will lose its ability to track me?" Kamijou muttered. "But you said that the transmitters are automatically produced at even intervals, right? If a new transmitter is created, won't Radiosonde Castle correct its course?"

"'They' are not that almighty," Birdway said halfheartedly. "It's true that 'they' systematically destroyed mountains and rivers and interfered with the workings of the planet itself, but 'they' cannot continue that forever. ...'They' are already at their limit. They cannot create a new transmitter, so we just need to destroy the one that is here now. Since the transmitters are set up in 50-kilometer intervals, the final transmitter has likely been placed

beneath Academy City. If we destroy it, Radiosonde Castle will pass right by us. After that, the members of the Anglican Church who are likely meaninglessly rushing around now will bring this to a safe conclusion."

A magical transmitter.

It was beneath Academy City.

If they could destroy it, they had a means of escape.

"..."

Kamijou looked down at his open right hand.

He then silently clenched it strongly.

Kamijou Touma was said to be at the center of all the disturbances around him, but he was not actually all that knowledgeable of the circumstances the world was in. He did not have the basis needed to actually calculate how much value there was in searching him out on such a large scale or how much meaning there was in keeping that from happening even if it meant getting Academy City involved.

But...

Kamijou understood that the results of those actions had brought danger to Academy City and to those close to him. And he knew what was necessary to avoid that danger.

What he had to do did not change.

It was the same as always.

A great conflict may have been over, but he still had to do the same things as before.

"Can I ask one question?"

"What?" said Birdway as she looked over at him.

"If I were to start running away from Academy City as fast as I could right now, what would happen with Radiosonde Castle?"

"Normally, it would alter its course and continue to follow you," the small girl responded. "But there is the issue of time. I mentioned that there was a time limit, right? If the final mark has been placed here, then Radiosonde Castle may drop on Academy City regardless of your location."

Birdway had helped create that situation, but she showed no sign of timidity about it.

"I see."

Kamijou Touma clearly clenched his right fist that time.

He ignored Index who was looking displeased.

"That's all I need to know."

The time to swing his right hand once more had come.

No. Even if his right hand had held no special power, what Kamijou Touma did would likely not have changed. He would have stood up to that crisis developing before his eyes and opposed the giant power lurking in its center. What he had been doing up until then was removing the weakness that divided his path based on whether he already had power or not.

And...

If it did not matter if one had a special power or not...

"Wait," said Hamazura, interrupting him.

As long as one had the will.

It may not have been at the level of Kamijou Touma, but he had overcome a few crises of his own.

Hamazura had protected the personal world around him.

But...

If the larger world spreading beyond it had not been protected, he would have lost the entirety of that personal territory.

Fremea did not know exactly what was going on, but she must have sensed the unrest in the atmosphere because her face grew cloudy. Hamazura grabbed her shoulders and pushed her away from him as he spoke.

"If the truth of World War III really is what Birdway says it is, then the world owes you one. In that case, you don't need to make that debt any bigger. I'll do my part to pay you back bit by bit."

"..."

Accelerator did not say anything, but he seemed to agree.

In actuality, it had not been Kamijou Touma's actions alone that had ended that war. It had mostly been the actions of many, many people intertwining complexly and supporting Kamijou. That support had been so great that a mere high school boy with a special power had been able to stand at a crossroads in history. And Accelerator and Hamazura Shiage had likely played a role in that supporting power.

But at the very least, a portion of that power was able to gather again at least partially due to the fact that Kamijou Touma had survived to that day.

Academy City's #1 flipped the switch on the electrode on his neck, and jumped up from the balcony to the roof.

Hamazura headed for the dorm's front door and spoke to Kamijou without turning around.

"You wait here. You've been working too much."

The sound of the door opening and closing reverberated through the dorm.

Kamijou looked back down at his right hand, and smiled slightly.

Just because he had a special power did not mean that he had to do anything special.

Just because he could negate all kinds of supernatural powers did not mean that he had to go charging out to stand as a shield before all kinds of powers.

Just as Kamijou was once more thinking deeply on the meaning of that, Birdway yawned and spoke.

"But those that will die without the necessary piece will die."

"Dammit!! I really just can't ignore this!!"

Part 2

The black stone did not even have the slightest scratch, and it was polished like a mirror.

The cylinder made of heavy stone rolled around like a drum with a mind of its own, and headed for Kanzaki at high speed.

A normal person would have likely met a fate similar to getting run over by a road roller.

"Tch. So this magic user is the type that doesn't show his face!!"

Kanzaki clicked her tongue and reached for Shichiten Shichitou, the Japanese sword longer than 2 meters that hung at her waist.

Technically, she was using the seven wires for a slicing attack.

Nanasen.

She aimed for the pathway the mysterious cylinder was moving along rather than the stone itself. She did not know how tough her enemy was, but Kanzaki knew that she could slice through the pathway. And they were

on the lowest level of a fortress floating at an altitude of 11,000 meters. Without that pathway, even the strongest enemy could not avoid falling.

She unhesitatingly sliced through it.

That bottom pathway extended from pillars hanging down from the giant ceiling above her head. She accurately severed only the narrow pillars on the right side of the pathway. The pathway lost its balance, and the entire floor tilted to the side.

Kanzaki was standing just far enough away to not be affected, but...

"!?"

An explosive wind blew violently.

Immediately after Kanzaki realized that it was a giant sphere jumping around the remaining pillars and charging towards her, a dull shock ran through her gut.

That's right.

A sphere, not a cylinder.

(Gh... bh...!! It can... change shape!?)

She did not even have time to hold it back with her sword's scabbard.

The sphere sank in.

Kanzaki's breathing felt like it would stop, but then the sphere made its next move.

It was changing shape again.

The enemy became a cylinder again, and opened up like a pair of double doors, revealing its insides. The action was similar to an iron maiden opening, but the inside was not filled with iron spikes.

What lay inside was a giant crossbow.

Without bringing her breathing back under control, Kanzaki immediately swung her body to the side.

It fired a projectile that was as thick as a human arm and more like a stake than an arrow. Kanzaki just barely managed to evade it, but by that time, the enemy had already closed and returned to its original cylindrical shape.

The cylinder took an action similar to kicking off one of the pillars connecting the scaffolding to the ceiling, and managed to get some distance between itself and Kanzaki. When the cylinder landed on a different piece of scaffolding, it remained in a diagonal position, balancing itself on the edge of the bottom circle.

It then spun around once.

Immediately afterwards, a change occurred in the metal balloons that were providing lift to Radiosonde Castle.

With a sound like overflowing steam, a large amount of gas started to be emitted.

It was not due to what Kanzaki had done.

The rate was much too fast.

The enemies were clearly trying to drop Radiosonde Castle on the target location.

(...So they really are after Academy City!!)

Kanzaki gritted her teeth, and the cylinder opened like double doors again.

The contents were exposed.

This time, it was not a crossbow.

What came out were multiple matchlock guns, their barrels lined up in a row.

The hammers that had cigarette-like flames burning at the ends all fell in unison.

The sound of them firing rang out.

Immediately afterwards, Kanzaki Kaori unhesitatingly charged forward.

Kanzaki could travel faster than the speed of sound, so avoiding those bullets that were travelling at subsonic speeds was like an expert martial artist truly going in for a cross counter against a child.

Her speed and reach were greater.

The crossbow from before had caught her off guard, so her reaction had been delayed, but when she could predict that a projectile was coming, she could get the timing right every time.

Kanzaki's footsteps exploded out and seemed as if they would destroy the pathway, and she lowered her hips and moved her head in order to accurately evade the multiple lead bullets. She continued forward, accurately aiming for the enemy that had quickly returned to its cylindrical form.

(This thing opens up faster than I expected. I won't have time to draw my sword.)

Kanzaki calmly analyzed the situation.

She unhesitatingly struck the cylinder with her right leg.

Perhaps as some kind of defense, the cylinder changed shape to a perfect cube, but that did not stop the attack.

Kanzaki sent the enemy flying a few dozen meters away.

A few of the pillars supporting the pathway were destroyed, and the entire pathway tilted. Kanzaki had been intending to send it out into the empty sky, but either by coincidence or by the object's intent, it managed to stay on the pathway as if it were hanging down from the pathway's remains.

(...Dammit. The magician himself might be worth it, but I don't have time to play around with some toy!!)

Kanzaki gritted her teeth, and then felt a chill run down her back.

She was wrong.

The flow of magic power was different from a mere spiritual item.

(It isn't using what is stored within it... It is refining magic power within itself and circulating it. It couldn't be...)

The net of a cube had a few different patterns it could take, but one of them was a cross.

If that cross corresponded to the form of a person...

"Th-this isn't a spiritual item? This is the magician himself who has optimized his physical body into this form!?"

Kanzaki did not just have a massive amount of power. She also carried out delicate analysis and operations, and that was why she had noticed that something was off.

In response, the cube spread out its sides, forming a flat plane in the shape of a cross.

She heard a strange noise.

It was a laugh.

It was the kind of laugh that barely reached one's ears, one that a girl would make with her hand up to her mouth.

"Hee hee."

But it was not just a single laugh. At first, Kanzaki thought there were other magicians around as she paid close attention to the source of the sound... but she finally frowned in confusion.

It was coming from that cross-shaped plane.

Countless sets of human lips both large and small appeared on its surface.

Because the plane was made of smoothly polished cold inorganic stone, the bewitching lips that were covering the surface seemed horribly out of place.

"Hee hee."

"Hee hee."

"Hee hee."

"If you correspond the cross shape with the human body, it would be theoretically possible... but would anyone really go that far!?"

"Wrong," sang all the lips in unison in a delicate soprano that was at complete odds with the form the voices were coming from. "Mjölnir from Norse mythology also corresponds to the cross, but Thor who possesses Mjölnir is not just a thunder god. He is also a god of agriculture who controls all forms of weather, and the hammer is also used as a symbol of granting children."

That was right.

The enemy's form was not fixed. The cylinder, the sphere, the cube. Only the cube could correspond to the cross, but there was something else that all the forms could correspond to:

A hammer.

And the crossbow and matchlock guns must have also given it the properties of a projectile.

Just after Kanzaki realized that, the countless lips that had appeared on the surface in order to chant began reciting a spell in unison.

A storm of bluish-white lightning began to appear in every direction from the cross-shaped plane from which the enemy had taken the form of a hammer.

Part 3

Accelerator flipped his electrode's switch, temporarily releasing the power of the #1, and jumped up to the roof of the tall building in one leap.

He stood on the railing, and looked around.

During the war in Russia, he had come into contact with "something like magic", and he had used a part of it. His body had been torn up from the

inside by that power, but he had managed to save a girl from the brink of death in exchange.

He had taught himself to contact that power.

After receiving some explanations from Birdway, he had been able to give clear outlines to that vague idea he had before.

He breathed in, stopped, and then used his power.

"...!!"

The blood vessels around his temples pulsated unnaturally. The cold wind was blowing on him, but he could not stop an unpleasant sweat from coming from his body. He envisioned a cup so filled with water that it was just barely able to hold it all in via surface tension. If it was tilted even slightly in any direction, something that must not be spilled would spill out. He understood that clearly.

He could not ignore it.

He controlled the power within his body with the delicateness of someone balancing that cup on top of their upraised index finger. He then continued his work.

Yes, his work.

He discerned the paths of the power flowing within the city or flowing in from outside the city and then flowing back outside the city.

However, he was not directly seeing it like beams of light. Just like seeing the flow of the colorless wind in a swaying meadow, he indirectly detected it by detecting the movements of things affected by the power rather than the power itself.

In other words, he watched the flow of people.

(That Birdway brat said that feng shui causes the energy of leylines to bend depending on the locations of mountains and rivers and that the most suitable palaces are built in the most suitable places for that reason. I don't know if these rules apply to the entire world, but it seems this world is divided into comfortable places and uncomfortable places by the flow of energy through the planet.)

Of course, if you removed the occult from the equation and thought about it similarly to the price of land changing depending on how much sun exposure a place had, then the conditions to make somewhere "comfortable" had to actually be quite strict.

Accelerator could not determine whether feng shui was purely occult or if it was nothing more than statistically calculating what environments allowed people to live longer.

In any case, he knew that the enemy was using feng shui.

(And people will naturally flow to those comfortable places, just like how the grass in a meadow sways in the wind. I can't just detect the flow of magic power, but I can observe the movements of people from a tall location.)

When he surveyed the area from the rooftop, he realized that the flow of people was not determined simply by the abundance of shops or the transportation facilities.

There were similar convenience stores on the same road, but people clearly went into some more than others.

One could get to the same destination by train or bus, but people tended to use the same method to an unnatural extent.

Even if Academy City was the center of the science side, it was of course still a part of the Earth. Even if the city itself thoroughly eliminated all artificial magic, it could not deny the properties and energy held by the planet itself.

When he thought about it, it was obvious.

That truth made Accelerator's breath catch in his throat.

(...So there's a net formed by this non-compelling "comfortableness"? Hell, and this is right in the middle of the science side's headquarters. It's like the entire city is being controlled by some strange power.)

That power could be used artificially to create the people-clearing fields used by magicians, but Accelerator had not stepped deeply enough into the world of magic to realize that.

For now, he merely reached out his hand for the objective in front of him.

(I can understand people gathering at brand-name shops or a bus terminal building, but there are some strange movements. *People are taking meaningless detours*. If 'they' used feng shui to add in some trick to the ley line, then this may be a trace of that trick.)

A single spot had an unnatural amount of that kind of power gathered in it.

That power was supposed to lay out a net that created the different flows of people, but it was all gathering unnaturally in that spot like bathwater being swallowed up by the drain.

It was not directly sending people in a certain direction, but it was having a definite effect in slightly altering the direction taken by the people who were freely moving around in various directions.

(That's the place.)

Once Accelerator had his answer, he pulled out his cell phone.

He said only what was necessary.

"I've found somewhere that feels out of place. It's District 7's Central Hub Transformer Station. Some kind of twisted and stagnated power is gathered there."

Part 4

Within a radius of 400 meters around the cross-shaped expanded cube, a high-voltage current emitted into the world exploded out all at once as a sphere-shaped storm.

"!!"

At that time, Kanzaki rushed toward the stairs leading up to a higher level. In order to get as far away from the square entrance as she could, she practically rolled across the stone floor.

Her rapid movements suddenly stopped.

Kanzaki jumped up more from something else's interference than from her own wishes.

(The electrical current is forcibly coming from the stone...!?)

"Gah..gh...!!"

Kanzaki intentionally regulated her breathing that had been thrown out of order.

That magician had modified his or her body for the sake of his or her goal. That was the result of a magic user that continued to grow in the absolute opposite direction from someone like Kanzaki who was born with bodily characteristics similar to the Son of God and could draw out a portion of his power. As if in exchange for what that magician had lost and cast aside, the power of his attacks had increased.

The very fact that he could keep up with one of the world's fewer than 20 Saints in a battle was strange.

(But this method is not in any of Necessarius's records... Is this a new type that has appeared after the war...?)

A sound like oil being poured onto a frying pan reached Kanzaki's ears.

The sound was coming from the square opening leading down.

The magician was making preparations for the second wave.

(The attack itself mostly relies on the laws of physics. It is simpler than a curse with no form, but his aim may be to weaken my legs by continuing to hit me with it...)

She heard the explosive sound of a high voltage current.

In the next instant, Kanzaki drew Shichiten Shichitou and stabbed the tip forcefully into the stone floor as if she had timed it.

She cut into the stone like it was made of tofu and then felt a different type of resistance.

In other words, she felt herself slicing through the high voltage current and neutralizing it.

(There are legends of swords slicing through lightning in Japan. In a country with such harsh changes in the weather, you cannot name yourself a magician if you do not have an understanding of how to deal with a thunder god!!)

That was what magic was.

It exceeded the laws of physics and brought one to an absurd battlefield.

If she messed up the timing of her attack, she would receive the attack head on, so she could not let her guard down, but she could deal with spells of that level.

Just as Kanzaki had determined that, she felt an unpleasant feeling at the nape of her neck.

It was not a physical sensation.

It was commonly referred to as a bad feeling about the situation. However, when there was a concrete basis for the feeling, it could not simply be laughed off.

In other words...

"What...? What is this massive amount of magic power...!?"

In order to observe the enemy, Kanzaki headed for the square entrance.

She stuck only her head out and saw the expanded cube that was her enemy. The magician's physical body was modeled off of Thor's hammer Mjölnir and resembled a cross. It was not standing upright or lying flat on the pathway. Instead, it was flying calmly in the air like a kite.

There was regularity to its movements.

It was moving in a giant circle that had a radius of 20 km. Bluish-white sparks flew along seeming to trail it. Like that, the Throwing Hammer drew a clean circle. Its speed increased. It was not fixed in place. It rapidly moved up like the curve of a quadratic function. In just the 10 seconds Kanzaki had been watching, the enemy's actual form had disappeared from view, leaving only the giant bluish-white glowing circle visible.

It was much too ominous a phenomenon to be referred to as an angel's halo.

From the flow of magic power, the circular symbol, and the Thor's hammer form the magician existed in, Kanzaki was able to guess what was coming next.

She unhesitatingly fled.

A bluish-white beam of light appeared coming from below and heading up as if to stab into the heavens. It shot straight through the center of that 20 kilometer radius circle.

Immediately afterwards, a third of Radiosonde Castle was utterly annihilated.

Part 5

Kamijou Touma ran through Academy City at night.

He was heading for the Central Hub Transformer Station that Accelerator had told him about.

Academy City's electricity was supplied by the wind turbines set up all across the city. That had the advantage of making it more difficult for a power outage to occur if some of them were destroyed in an accident or a disaster, but it added complexity because the network of power supplies spread all across the city. That made facilities that controlled the flow of electricity necessary.

One central hub existed in each district.

(But why there...?)

Kamijou thought as he ran, but he could not come up with an answer. It was possible electricity or something else related to the area functioned as an occult symbol.

Hamazura Shiage had begun heading for the same location just a bit ahead of him, but Kamijou had not caught up to him on the way. Kamijou was

pretty sure he was taking the shortest route there, so the other boy may have taken a different route.

Eventually, Kamijou made it to the Central Hub Transformer Station.

That stern name had made Kamijou envision something that looked like a large scale industrial complex or a military facility, but he realized he had been wrong when he arrived.

It was surrounded by a concrete wall and barbed wire, but it had no guards or anything like that. Some security robots were periodically patrolling around the building, but that was no different than the security at a children's park in Academy City.

Kamijou looked up at the thick wall.

(...Climbing over would probably be fastest.)

Having made that decision, he picked up an empty can from the ground at his feet. Before he actually climbed up, he wanted to make sure there wasn't any electricity running through the barbed wire.

He threw the can.

It hit the taut wire, but no sparks were created.

"Here goes," Kamijou muttered as he faced the wall.

The barbed wire had sharp spikes in order to stop intruders, but they were placed at even intervals. The rest was just plain wire. If he was careful, he would not get hurt even if he grabbed the wire directly.

(It would be even safer if I had a thick rubber mat...but I guess these spikes are long enough to pierce through one.)

As he thought that, Kamijou glanced around the facility from atop the wall.

The area was not all that large.

The actual land was at most 30 meters square and there was only one two story square building. However, there was equipment that looked like drums lined up all across the area. Power cables stretched from the ground around them, so they likely had something to do with the transformation. He did not think it would be a good idea to touch them.

Kamijou jumped down from the wall and snuck into the inner portion of the facility.

His goal lay ahead.

Part 6

A third of Radiosonde Castle had been annihilated.

An avalanche of wreckage did not rain down on the Kanto region because the massive amount of energy had blown away the third of the fortress to the extent that not even dust remained. That spell was powerful enough to forcibly destroy the ozone layer and it was similar to a solenoid coil. The Throwing Hammer had continually revolved around that circular orbit while carrying a massive amount of electricity. That had given the electrified air in the center of the circular orbit a vertical vector.

...That explanation alone seemed to make sense, but the attack was actually physically impossible.

With just the laws of science, the phenomenon created some inconsistencies.

But magic compensated for that and forced it to work.

"haa...haa...!!"

Kanzaki breathed heavily right next to the edge of the destruction.

The edge glowed orange like the inside of a blast furnace. The stone walls and ceiling that had been creating an odd sense of intimidation were no longer there. Just a running long jump's distance away, there was nothing but open space.

She had used her supersonic speed to its limit without thinking of the consequences.

She had headed forward tearing through walls and pillars.

But she could not do it again.

She had no way to deal with it if the same thing happened again.

She had not been able to use her sword or wires in time for a few walls and had merely tackled her way through them at full speed. She had used a bare minimum of defensive spells, but her body was crying out in protest.

And most importantly, she would no longer have anywhere to run to after two more of the same attack.

Her situation was close to hopeless, but at the same time, a question grew in Kanzaki's mind.

(I thought he or his organization was trying to drop Radiosonde Castle on Academy City!? Why would he destroy it like that...!?)

Speaking of goals, there were many mysteries regarding that Throwing Hammer itself.

That thing could produce destruction that rivaled the mobile fortress.

However, that was merely a means, not a goal. If the magician had modified his or her physical body to that extent there had to be a "magician-like" reason to match beyond efficiency or rationality.

Protecting a loved one. Killing a hated enemy. Reviving someone who had died. Creating a dragon that had never actually existed.

Whether it was actually doable or not, a magician would have their goal carved into themselves in Latin...they would have a magic name. But she could not feel anything like that from that Throwing Hammer.

It had such great firepower, but it did not use it to directly attack Academy City.

Dropping Radiosonde Castle on Academy City was likely the overall goal, but it had unhesitatingly blown away a third of the fortress.

In those methods that gave a jumbled and mismatched impression, she could not see the consistent and, in some cases, abnormally tenacious behavior that was characteristic of magicians.

Was there some reason behind it that only the Throwing Hammer could understand?

Or...

"Has he...already lost his objective...?" Kanzaki muttered.

For example, what if the magician's magic name was to protect a loved one and that utterly changed body was the result of gathering everything needed to do so? And what if that loved one had died partway through gathering those things making that goal disappear?

In that case, only the power would remain.

That power would drift about the world without even a direction to aim its malice. Because the power had no strong direction, it would occasionally be swept along and go along with the views of another and it would occasionally be swept along and wield that power. But a power with no purpose behind it would attack the world with overwhelming ferocity.

He could not cast aside the power he had ended up with.

A true monster would carry out destruction just by walking down the street. How much damage would be done to a city by someone who decided on their actions for the day based on nothing more substantial than the

thoughts caused by a TV commercial or a collection box next to a cash register?

An apathetic destroyer.

A natural enemy that did not even wish for the destruction of the world.

Someone who would destroy on a whim what people had desperately built up.

If a failed one like that had existed for long, it was strange that the world still existed as it did. Since Necessarius, an organization that dealt with magicians like that, had no records of that magician, he may have failed only recently.

What came to Kanzaki's mind first was...

"...World War III."

It had officially ended very quickly after only about 2 weeks and the rapid and precise deployment of large scale forces centered on Academy City had kept the casualties to a minimum, but that disturbance had still covered the entire map of the world. It was possible that there had been battles that had not been officially announced and tragedies that no one knew about.

"You fool." Kanzaki frowned at the cause she could not even imagine while taking a drastic measure. "Even if you failed like that, you would not have gone down this path had you recalled that the people around you have things they wish to protect."

It may have been "magician-like" to not understand that fact.

It was completely one directional. Magicians gained explosive propulsion by restricting themselves with their purpose. That may have been why they did not understand the feelings of those who headed down other paths.

But Kanzaki knew.

She knew of magicians who had stood back up even after losing their goal. In Necessarius, there was a rune card magician who had been unable to protect a certain girl, but he still continued to fight in order to protect the world that girl lived in. There was a magician who had lost her precious partner in an area between science and magic, but she now used a golem with that partner's name. There were many nuns who had been treated as sacrificial pawns by their parent church, the Roman Catholic Church, and then banished, but they continued to believe in God.

Losing something was indeed sad.

But that did not surely send one on a twisted path and it did not act as an indulgence.

And most importantly, destruction did not lead to the salvation the destroyer wished for.

Salvation was not something one simply depended on others for.

Kanzaki had seen smiles reappear on the faces of those who had stood back up countless times while coughing up blood. She could say for sure that she understood this. Kanzaki respected the types of strength she did not possess herself and that was why she did not hold any easily influenced sympathy for what that Throwing Hammer had become.

"...Salvare000."

Instead, she named herself.

A saving hand for those who cannot be saved.

Without hesitation, she seemed to be stabbing out with the magic name she had carved into herself in Latin.

The Throwing Hammer that had lost even its magic name began flying to form the giant circle again. It had an instability that was somehow reminiscent of a kite being swept away by the wind after its string broke.

This time, the 20 kilometer radius was oriented vertically.

It looked as if over half of the fortress would be destroyed if Mjölnir was fired, but the magician showed no sign of hesitation.

Part 7

According to Accelerator, the transmitter created using the leylines was at the very center of the Central Hub Transformer Station.

Kamijou forced open the lock on the back door using a flat-head screwdriver and entered the building.

The space was filled with pale illumination from fluorescent lights, but there was no sign of anyone there. There was a room with over 10 computers lined up in it, but no one was there operating them despite the numbers on the screens constantly scrolling. They seemed to be set so they could be operated remotely. The workers may have been working from home.

(They probably aren't supposed to be doing that...)

But it was better than having some diligent worker still there. Kamijou did not have time for any unnecessary disturbances.

He walked through the facility.

He soon arrived at the very center.

It was one square room in a square building and it had no real design to it. There were large computers lined up that checked on and controlled the power network so all the power coming from the great number of turbines within that district could be sent to the appropriate places.

It was not uncommon for places with equipment like that to be kept cold like a refrigerator, but that did not seem to be one of those cases. Most likely, the bookshelf-like cases had cold air flowing through them or some kind of liquid cooling system was used.

"The center..." Kamijou muttered as he walked across the room. "The center of the facility..."

But there was nothing like a magical transmitter in that spot. He thought there might have been some kind of invisible gas or energy, so he swung his right hand around randomly, but he never felt any kind of reaction.

Was it really there?

Had they gotten the spot wrong? Or was it something that only a professional magician would be able to recognize?

(...Wait.)

Kamijou suddenly remembered something and looked at the center of the room.

Technically, he was looking at the thick concrete floor.

The roof was not leaking, but there was an unnatural dark stain there.

"Underground...? Is it below this thick concrete!?"

Part 8

By quickly flying in a giant circle while surrounded by a high voltage current, the Mjölnir spell caused the electrified air within the circle to move at high speed.

Once it was fired, it produced enough destruction to blow away a third of Radiosonde Castle which was a few dozen kilometers long.

Kanzaki, a Saint, did not have enough physical strength left to evade it again.

And she did not intend to evade it.

Using one's knowledge to prevail in a difficult situation was a magician's specialty.

(...When I think about it, why was it necessary to interfere with this fortress in such a roundabout way?)

Due to its altitude, neither an airplane nor a rocket had been able to make use of its normal level of performance against Radiosonde Castle. Due to that, Kanzaki had gone up in a rocket and then reentered the atmosphere in order to land on top of the fortress.

But...

(Except for special cases like the #10 Saint, modern magicians are prohibited from a certain action. That is why I had to go up above the fortress first rather than going directly to it.)

The reason she had chosen to fall.

The reason she had not directly flown there.

Kanzaki Kaori referred to that.

There was one legend about Peter, one of the Twelve Apostles. He had confronted a magician named Simon Magus who was famous for trying to buy sacred acts. When Simon had freely flown through the sky, what had Peter said?

It was...

"Oh, demons carrying this magic user, promptly let go!!"

Flight was prohibited.

That barrier existed for all magicians living in modern times.

That means of interception had spread too far due to it being simple yet both powerful and effective, and due to it being based on a famous story. Thanks to that, humans were restricted by the fact that they would be brought down the instant they tried to fly without wings.

(I can't allow myself to be led astray.)

That magician's strange appearance had led to her forgetting something very basic.

The Throwing Hammer was not a spiritual item or a weapon. It was a living human being.

A voiceless voice let out a cry that was something like a shock-wave.

The perfectly controlled giant circle was crushed in an instant. The Throwing Hammer lost control and slammed into the fortress with a high voltage current trailing behind it. When it hit, a massive amount of sparks exploded out, but it was nothing compared to the destruction that had been about to be fired.

"...That appearance was necessary to change what people aimed their interception spells at, wasn't it?"

The Throwing Hammer had smashed through a few floors of the fortress and was surrounded by rubble. Kanzaki slowly approached it.

"If someone determined you were a spiritual item or a weapon, they would begin putting together interception spells to deal with those things. Simply put, you made people choose something other than an anti-personnel spell because an anti-personnel spell would easily defeat you. Thor's hammer would be meaningless if it could not fly, but you would be shot down if you flew in this day and age. That was why you thought up a way to keep people from recognizing you for what you were as they tried to lock on to you as a target."

With a sound like plastic boards folding, the Throwing Hammer changed from the flat plane back to the cube. It gave up on flying and seemed to be trying to roll away from Kanzaki.

But it was no use.

When the magician Simon had been brought down, he had died. For magicians, obstructing the opponent's flight was not just something that brought the opponent's altitude down to zero. The effects depended on what part of the story about Peter was being most strongly emphasized, but there was always something more than the simple damage from the fall added in.

As such, the expanded cube was unable to return to the proper cube.

The same sound continued, but the edges simply would not connect. It was like a die that a child had tried and failed to make out of drawing paper.

"That is also why you used that large attack to blow away a good portion of the fortress. When I realized that you were a human, you felt a risk greater than just the immediate battle. ...Since you have lost your goal, did you fear having that method taken from you as well? And yet if you did lose your lingering attachments to the past, it would likely be easier to seek out a new goal."

That Throwing Hammer had been in charge of controlling the metal balloons providing Radiosonde Castle's lift. She could not overlook it. If she defeated the Throwing Hammer there, she could stop the fortress from rapidly falling. She could prevent a catastrophe that would affect Academy City and likely the entire world.

Kanzaki Kaori recalled her magic name.

Salvare000.

A saving hand for those who cannot be saved.

But she did not think that easily permitting the Throwing Hammer to live like that would lead to carrying out that goal. She believed that the salvation in the magic name she aspired to was not something so simple.

"...It seems there is a problem in how you live your life, so you need to think deeply about what you intend to do before you take action. I will give you the time and place to do that whether you wish for it or not."

The Throwing Hammer remained silent.

In its silence, it gave up on returning to the cube form and collapsed to the ground as the flat expanded cube.

But it did not stop there.

Without making a noise, something like a net appeared on the surface. Along the lines of that net, the flat expanded cube split apart complexly. At first glance, the shapes it was splitting into looked random, but they all became smaller expanded cubes. The many small expanded cubes looked like puzzle pieces and they started flapping weakly like many butterflies taking off in unison.

(...So even as he flees, he chose a projectile.)

It was possible his or her magic name lay in that fact.

Kanzaki thought for a second, but then mercilessly activated Peter's interception spell.

As if a giant metal sheet had struck them from above, the mass of expanded cubes fell in unison. They lost their power and were swept away into the sky by the wind.

Kanzaki did not think the magician was dead.

In fact, she had no idea how one was supposed to kill someone who could split up to that level.

"..."

For an instant, Kanzaki's focus remained on the Throwing Hammer floating in the wind, but she finally shook herself from it.

She would make sure to save that magician later.

But Kanzaki Kaori had something to do first.

Part 9

The sound of a heavy piece of metal striking something hard rang out.

It was the sound of Kamijou Touma swinging down a shovel he had found in the facility, but as he had expected, it was not enough to break the thick concrete floor. He had tried it a few dozen times already and made many white marks on the floor, but that had only taken a few millimeters off the surface. Not a single crack had appeared.

His hands that were swinging down the shovel were at their limit.

Kamijou could not bear it any longer and tossed the shovel aside.

“Fuck!!”

What he was after was below there.

The transmitter guiding Radiosonde Castle was most likely something that could easily be destroyed with just a slight touch from Kamijou’s right hand.

But he could not do anything without touching it.

That thick wall of concrete was a completely normal object that could be found anywhere and it had nothing to do with the world of the occult, but it was blocking Kamijou Touma’s way.

A power called Imagine Breaker resided in his right hand.

Using that right hand, Kamijou had defeated the #1 esper and the leader of God’s Right Seat.

But he could only negate supernatural powers.

He could not destroy completely normal concrete, he could not outrun a completely normal car, and his blood could be shed by a completely normal box cutter.

That was all he was.

Up until then, he had fought cleverly in order to ensure that those things would not work against him, but his strategy of using every trick in the book had finally bitten him back.

(What do I do…?)

Kamijou looked down at his numb hands.

(At this rate, Radiosonde Castle is going to fall on Academy City. There's no guarantee that the danger will leave even if I leave the city. I have to destroy that transmitter somehow, but I can't get to it with this thick concrete in the way!!)

Time was running out.

Radiosonde Castle was approaching.

Rushing things would not solve the situation. Kamijou picked back up the shovel that's edge had chipped. He was seriously worried about the condition of the bones in his wrists, but he had to at least do something.

Suddenly, the wall to Kamijou's side was blown away by a force from outside.

A great amount of rubble and dust poured into the room.

What had come crashing through the wall was a piece of construction equipment facing backwards. The reason it was backwards was most likely to protect the arm portion on the front. Instead of a bucket used to dig dirt, the arm had a sharp spike on it that vibrated electronically.

Kamijou recognized the boy sitting in the driver's seat.

It was Hamazura Shiage.

"Hey, boss. Having trouble?"

"Cough cough!! Wh-what is that thing? And where did you get it!?"

"It's a boring machine used to open small tunnels for underground cables. It was inside the facility grounds."

As Academy City had no power lines, the power cables and communications lines had to be laid underground. As such, pieces of equipment like that were not too rare.

"I don't understand all the details about this magic or whatever, but we basically just have to destroy the thing that's calling in that fucking huge fortress, right? In that case, wouldn't a little horsepower be helpful?"

The bottom of the vehicle that was wrapped in metal treads remained stationary and the upper portion with the driver's seat and the arm on it rotated around. Hamazura was bringing the sharp spike to the center of the room.

He did not have any kind of special power.

That was why, when a powerful esper appeared, he did not take them on head on. Instead, he would first try to find a safe area. And when the situation also involved the occult, his options were limited even further. In order to protect those he did not want to lose no matter what and in order to save his comrades from unreasonable situations, Hamazura would occasionally confront people with extraordinary powers, but that was not really his area of expertise. Basically, Hamazura Shiage had nothing more than a commonplace role that had no place in the world of science or magic and could easily be killed at the slightest chance.

But…

When the situation had nothing to do with those kinds of unreasonable powers, Hamazura Shiage could solve normal problems with normal techniques.

The tremendous noise of the spike digging into that concrete floor exploded out. That floor had not budged after Kamijou struck it with that shovel again and again, but thick cracks ran through it in no time at all. Gray dust flew into the air, the cracks connected, and the thick floor broke. For the first few minutes, the thick noise of the concrete breaking continued, but after that, it changed to a softer sound. It was now boring into the earth below the concrete.

“Shit!! What!?”

Something suddenly changed.

A high-pitched noise almost like glass shattering rang out and orange sparks started flying from the sturdy spike. Hamazura forcibly operated the arm trying to dig further, but the tip of the tough tungsten alloy spike broke like a piece of hard candy.

The broken tip of the spike must have struck the cable along the arm because the spike itself stopped vibrating.

Kamijou peered down into the darkness of the newly opened hole.

Something was inside.

The object glowed a muddy red like some kind of strange jewel. It was cold like glass, it was hard like stone, and it colored everything an ominous blood-red.

It was a crystal about the size of a fist.

Most likely, it was…

“Reach it…”

Kamijou stretched his hand down into the hole.

Pain shot from his joints as he stretched them to their limits. He ignored the pain and stretched his hand, his fingertips, deeper and deeper down.

“Reach iiii

Part 11

Hamazura Shiage abandoned the piece of heavy machinery and fled the Central Hub Transformer Station with Kamijou Touma. What they had done was necessary, but they were not necessarily going to get a chance to explain that fact.

Accelerator jumped down from the building's rooftop and landed near the two of them. He did not have a single scratch on his body. Looking annoyed, he flipped his electrode's switch and leaned his weight on his modern cane.

"…Looks like it's over," he said while switching his cell phone to speakerphone using his thumb.

Birdway's familiar voice came from the phone.

"It seems Radiosonde Castle's speed was carefully controlled and it has landed in the sea off of the Boso Peninsula in the Chiba prefecture. There was no damage caused by high waves. I'm a little bothered by how slow Academy City's reaction speed was, but the situation was resolved nonetheless."

Kanzaki Kaori sat atop the topmost level of Radiosonde Castle that was floating in the ocean like an artificial island. She sighed.

She could communicate using her spiritual item once more, and she was currently listening to Agnese.

"The crisis has been confirmed to have been avoided. That means we now have to focus on gathering information. After all, we still do not know who exactly the enemy was. It isn't known how long that fortress is going to float there, but please gather as much data as you can before any hints there disappear."

"…Understood. However, I feel that focusing on putting up defensive spells so the water pressure does not destroy the fortress would increase the amount of data we could get down the line."

As she spoke, Kanzaki stood back up.

Because there was a danger of it sinking, she did not intend to investigate deep within the fortress, but she did need to gather what information she could.

“I’d like to give you some words of thanks now, but I just remembered that I never got to the real issue at hand in our discussions,” said Birdway over the cell phone.

“You’re going to explain *more*? How many more hours are you going to keep us restrained…?” complained Hamazura sounding utterly fed up with it all.

“Don’t worry. Only the true core of the issue is left: ‘their’ name.”

Kanzaki Kaori discovered something truly out of place in one section of Radiosonde Castle.

It was unknown if the enemy was from the science side or the magic side, but that structure felt as if it had been built to look like the Star of Bethlehem, a magic side fortress. In order to give it the image of the fortress it was based on, the parts making up Radiosonde Castle had the designs of old churches and temples.

She had found something that completely ruined the atmosphere that had been built up.

It was a message covering one wall written in red spray paint.

The writing was messy.

It was nothing like the almost artistic kinds of graffiti often seen. Instead, the wall simply had the letters quickly drawn out on it which completely destroyed the overall image the rest of the fortress had created.

“Them”.

Those who had come about in the process of World War III. Those who were still squirming about after the war had ended.

For those three who had protected those important to them in that war, that was information they had to be made aware of.

“Yes,” Birdway said, “‘Their’ name seems to be…”

The message covering the wall before Kanzaki said the following:

Welcome home, hero.

Kanzaki knew who it referred to.

Just before she had set out on that plan to deal with Radiosonde Castle, she had heard from another magician named Itsuwa that a certain boy had been sighted.

"…"

And…

The name of the ones who left the message was written at the end.

It said…

"…Gremlin," Birdway finished.

From "Gremlin".

That was the name of a type of fairy that was believed to cause malfunctions in machinery and to make weapons such as airplanes unusable.

That was a new generation of the occult that had only started being passed down by humans once the concept of machines had been created.

It was a symbol of one side of the world eating into the other side.

In that world where the winners of World War III, the science side, had greatly spread, a type of occult that would devour it had been born.

Epilogue: A Rest, but a Mixture in the Dark Side. *Birdway's_Speech.*

“It seems Gremlin’s next target is the United States,” Birdway said once Kamijou and the others had returned to his dorm. “I don’t know what they intend to do, but I have gotten ahold of information that a few magicians have already arrived on the Hawaiian Islands. Given how much of a commotion Gremlin’s ‘greeting’ caused, they will likely cause chaos on a global scale once they seriously begin to act. If we are to crush them, it has to be now.”

A greeting.

To Gremlin, that large scale incident that could have easily caused catastrophic damage to the human race was nothing more than a means of confirming if Kamijou Touma was still alive and a greeting meant to let their existence be known by those who needed to know.

If Gremlin got serious, no one would be able to say it was not their problem.

A calamity of that level awaited them.

Having been able to sense that the impending crisis may have been fortunate for those who happened to be there in that dorm. …But it was up to each one of them whether they would take advantage of that knowledge.

However…

“Wait a second,” said Accelerator. “Fuck that. I only listened to what you had to say because there were some things I wanted to hear about, thanks to what I’ve gone through, I have no intention of acting as your pawn from here on out.”

“You seem to be mistaken,” said Birdway as she lightly waved her index finger. “We don’t really want your help.”

“…”

“Oh? You said getting dragged into this was an annoyance, but now you’re not looking too pleased about not being considered part of the fighting force. You certainly are a selfish bastard,” Birdway said with one side of her mouth raised mockingly. “I only answered your questions because it looked like you were dying to know the answers, but you talk like you're standing at the center of the stage and act like that’s the natural state of things… I’m

guessing you've been rather spoiled by those around you up until now. Are you the type that always gets the piece of the Christmas cake that has the Santa doll on it?"

"Tch," Accelerator clicked his tongue. "Fine then. I have my own life. I'll disappear now."

"…That's fine. If you can manage it."

"Ah?"

A dangerous light resided in his red eyes because he thought of the possibility of having someone close to him used as a hostage in order to negotiate with him.

But Birdway shook her head.

"Don't worry. I am not Academy City. I'm not going to force you to do anything and I see no need to search for anything to use in a negotiation with you."

"…"

"But my cabal analyzes the leaders and charismatic people of various organizations in order to search out the best course with which to seize the core of the world. As an expert in that, I know."

"Know what?"

"That there is a definitive difference between those who just give in to peace and those who lost peace and regained it with their own strength. There are many different kinds of heroes, but your direction was decided the instant you reached out your hand to save Fremea Seivelun. …So unfortunately for you, you will come even if I explicitly tell you not to. And you will lean further and further in that direction, the longer you live in that peace you wished for so greatly. That may have sounded like some kind of riddle, but later you will understand what I mean more than you would like."

Accelerator did not respond.

He merely violently opened the front door and left.

"…What do you mean?" said Hamazura blankly.

He had a feeling that that exchange had not been completely unrelated to him.

The difference between those who just give in to peace and those who lost peace and regained it with their own strength.

Leaning farther in the direction of fighting the longer one spent in peace.

It didn't really click with him, but he still felt a chill run down his spine. That sounded to him like someone who actually desired a battle and would drown in blood within the darkness.

Birdway approached behind Hamazura and spoke.

"…Do you want me to give you a spoiler?"

"Wah!?"

"If you leave this room, you will find out eventually on your own, but there are some people who feel pain when everything is not spoiled for them. The age of internet searches can be a troublesome thing sometimes." Birdway sighed. "I don't want you to get the wrong idea, but I'm not underestimating you all and I do not hold any ill will for you. There are many different kinds of heroes, but there are some who are charismatic because of their great selfishness and have some messed up set of values that makes them find mercilessly killing women and children to be 'cool'. Compared to people like that, people who would save Fremea Seivelun and expect nothing in return are a much better level of heroes."

"…Then…"

"But that image of the hero is a problem. You saved Fremea Seivelun without thinking about the danger to yourself. I'm sure you had your reasons, but you would likely have saved someone else in the same way even if those reasons did not apply for that person. You are the type of person who saves an individual or the world without thinking of whether it will be to your advantage or not," Birdway said. "That is why you cannot flee from the fighting. Even if you live a blessed life within the peace you desperately regained, you will realize it. …You will be happy, but are the people around you happy? You have the power needed to save an individual or the world, so is it really right to just sit there and abandon them?"

"…"

"You can deny it in words, but when it comes down to it, you will act. Just like you did when you saved Fremea Seivelun. You are not a weak person who merely gives in to peace. You are a strong person who regained that peace yourself after you lost it. People like that bear the fate of constantly suffering over whether to choose to fight as they once did. …Even if doing so has the risk of causing cracks in the peace that person has regained."

Weaknesses brought on by excellence.

Dangers hidden within goodness.

Birdway mercilessly dug into Hamazura because she had seen many of those.

"As I said before, there are many different kinds of heroes. Some of them have built up a wonderful aesthetic of protecting those important to themselves even if it means abandoning others. But you cannot choose that path. After all, you took action for the sake of Fremea Seivelun. …And you knew the risks that would bring."

And if he ignored the world's problem brought on by Gremlin, damages and sacrifices greater than just Fremea would likely come.

As Hamazura lived his peaceful days that held no danger with Takitsubo, Mugino, Kinuhata, Fremea, Hanzou, and Kuruwa, he would begin to have certain thoughts crop up in his heart.

If he had the strength to build up and protect something like that, was it okay to only make himself happy?

"…My conclusion is that it is okay to be happy. There is no reason to feel guilty about it. But even though I've told you that, you will not live accordingly. *Even if you agree with me now*, you will unhesitatingly charge forward when the time comes. That way of thinking is noble, but I feel it is a sad life to live. That may be why some people are strongly attracted to people like that and feel the need to pass down the stories of those heroes."

"…"

Hamazura himself did not understand what he truly thought, but Birdway spoke as if it had all already been settled. Was it based on her statistical data from observing so many people?

(You've gotta be kidding me.)

He had risked his life and protected Takitsubo. He did not want anything to happen that would certainly harm Mugino or Kinuhata. He had no reason to go out of his way to head to some dangerous place. There were organizations and specialists who dealt with the dangerous aspects of the world and they had managed to keep the history of mankind continuing to this day. So Hamazura had no reason to bear that burden. He had no reason to take any actions that would bring risks to those he cared about.

But…

What if another innocent person like Fremea Seivelun was crying out in front of Hamazura's eyes? What if someone was holding a gun to that person's head?

Could he just stay quiet and overlook that?

Could he let that person die just because it could damage what he already had?

In Skill-Out, being weak had been the norm and everyone had believed that they could not truly change anything. But he was no longer the same as he had been back then.

Hamazura had actually won absurd battles and successfully protected those he cared about from a global war.

Could he still use the excuse of "I have no power, so I can't save you"?

Would he accept that excuse from himself anymore?

"I'm not telling you to think deeply on this," said Birdway dropping the tone of her voice down to a pitying one.

There was a rare sincerity to her voice.

"…It would actually be easier for me if you were able to deny it. I pray that you can do so…even though I know it's hopeless."

Following Accelerator's lead, Hamazura Shiage walked heavily out of the dorm.

Birdway folded her arms over her small chest and looked at Kamijou.

"As expected, you are the last one left."

"It is my room, you know?"

"Well, I saved you from the Arctic Ocean on the assumption that you would get dragged into this, but you hold something so strange that it makes those two look like nothing," Birdway said as she opened Kamijou's refrigerator without asking and started devouring a fish sausage. "After all, I was able to give a proper warning to those two due to my continued research of various types of leaders and charismatic people, but you have a nature that has *made even me start unintentionally thinking about getting you involved in this*."

"I'm not doing it because I want to."

"But you do not give up on it partway through."

"The ones causing the disturbance are coming to me. I have no choice."

"That is why it is not necessary to bring you in. You stand at the center without putting any work into gathering information or creating points of contact." Birdway smiled thinly. "..In truth, about half of the people in the world have a portion of that nature. But most of them either ignore those

points of contact and continue with their lives, or do a bad job of getting involved and end up falling by the wayside before reaching the end. In that regard, it may be that you shine not at the starting point or the end point, but during the process in between."

"?"

"Having misfortune is not your defining characteristic. You excel when it comes to converting that misfortune into your own strength."

Birdway grabbed a few more fish sausages as souvenirs and headed for the dorm's entrance accompanied by the men wearing all black.

She spoke without turning around.

"Well, I'll be relying on that nature of yours for a bit longer. Next is Hawaii. Now that Gremlin has confirmed that you are alive, they will be acting with a countermeasure for your right hand planned out. This will likely turn into a deadly battle even greater than what you have experienced before...*and I need you to get wrapped up in it just like you always do*."

Kamijou heard the door open and then close.

Kamijou and Index were the only ones left.

"Touma," said Index quietly calling his name. "Touma, you're going somewhere again."

Index asked Touma the following question because she knew him well, and because she was anxious about what would become of him.

"I was really worried. I was really anxious. Touma, you don't have a trump card that will ensure your victory. There is no rule saying that you will come back. If you continue these battles where you don't know if you will win, the odds of you coming back will be lower. Are you still going to go despite that?"

"Well…" Kamijou said as he looked down at his right hand and lightly opened and closed its fingers. "If possible, I don't want to continue doing this kind of thing. But this time, I have to be a part of this. I think the way I am related to this incident is probably different from all the ones before."

"?"

"At the end of World War III, Fiamma of the Right said one of his objectives in that war was to obtain my right hand." Kamijou clenched his fist. "And this time, 'they'…Gremlin is aware of my right hand. They even sent out that ridiculously huge fortress just to find where I was. I don't know if they want my right hand or if they're just wary of it, but I am probably standing at another crossroads. Just like I was during World War III."

“Touma…”

“I want to know the truth behind my right hand’s power.”

At the end of World War III, Kamijou’s right arm had been severed. That severed arm had not been reattached.

It had grown back from nothing.

He had no idea what materials it was made of, what power had been used, or what method had been used.

But he did know that it had led to him regaining Imagine Breaker.

“I have to know. If Gremlin’s movements could spread to a global scale, I have to figure out how I am related to the base of it all and I have to work out what I can do to have an effect on Gremlin’s plan.”

“…”

“But Imagine Breaker has exceeded the category of a mere power of the science side. I most likely need information from both the science side and the magic side in order to learn of its true nature. I need information from a much deeper place than what is recorded in the 103,000 grimoires in your head. …For that reason too, I can’t let myself be left behind in the flow of these events. If I don’t take the ticket Birdway has presented to me, I will never be able to grasp that information about myself.”

Kamijou then fell silent for a bit.

He clenched his right fist so hard it started to hurt.

“…In the end, I am joining this deadly fight for my own sake. Ha ha. I’m no different from a berserker.”

Kamijou laughed in self derision, but it did not seem that he was able to stand still any longer.

However, Index felt that Kamijou Touma would likely have headed to the center of that disturbance even if all that had not happened.

A large scale magic incident was going to occur on the Hawaiian Islands.

Many people lived there, and those people would surely suffer when that incident occurred. From the way things were going, it was possible that many people would die.

He would have taken action even if he had only known that much.

Kamijou Touma had never needed some great reason to take action. Without doing anything, he would get wrapped up in a situation, he would not abandon the dangerous situation partway through, and he held the

strength needed to resolve it. He had saved many people in that way and Index herself was one of them.

There may have been people who asked why.

He may not have realized just how dangerous the actions he was taking were, but his answer was simple.

For myself.

Accelerator walked through the city at night with his modern cane.

Last Order and Misaka Worst were walking with him.

“Ohhh! Walking through the glittering city at night has an adult feeling to it, says Misaka as Misaka looks around restlessly.”

“You say that, but it looks to Misaka like you are only looking at the restaurants.”

“It’s absurd for the little sister to look down on her big sister like that!! says Misaka as Misaka checks on the pyramid structure!!”

“What value does a big sister have if she loses to her little sister when it comes to chest size?”

Last Order tried to attack Misaka Worst, but Misaka Worst easily avoided the smaller girl. Accelerator thought as he watched them.

He had cast aside the path of evil in order to regain that.

He was determined to do whatever it took even if it was unlike him.

As a result, he was satisfied and had at the very least succeeded in protecting those he wished to protect.

But there was something he had not realized before because he had been so focused on obtaining the goal before his eyes.

There was still a path beyond that point.

Accelerator silently thought about what that path meant and where it led.

Hamazura Shiage was also walking through the city at night.

The way home for them all was the same up to a certain point, so Takitsubo, Mugino, and Kinuhata were with him. Fremea was fast asleep on his back and there was a hint of a dangerous light in Takitsubo’s expressionless eyes.

“But Academy City’s darkness seems like it’s super sticking around. It feels like a lot more returning groups are going to super appear like those Freshmen.”

“Well, it was a gathering of people who had turned their backs on and shut out any kind of normal life. There are going to be some who couldn’t adapt. And that was the quickest way of *supporting the speed at which Academy City’s strange technology advances*. As long as no one comes up with a better idea, similar things are going to happen.”

“But this did have a super result because it made a division between the people who entered the darkness because they super wanted to and the people who were thrown into the darkness despite super not wanting to.”

“…That division may be based on the scale of how much the people just want to be left alone.”

Hamazura thought.

The darkness still remained in that city. There was a danger of something new appearing. But it seemed one of the reasons the darkness was picking up speed lay outside Academy City.

In that case, what did it mean to fight that outside cause?

He could not stop the people who plunged into the darkness of their own free will, but what about stopping Gremlin who were working secretly outside and creating the need that led to those people plunging into the darkness?

Was that really a situation where it was just someone else’s problem?

Weren’t they a related party just by being in Academy City?

Hamazura Shiage silently thought while surrounded by the comrades he had regained with his own hands.

The nighttime city was cloaked in a silent darkness.

The three of them had the same thought.

Where does this path lead?

Kamijou Touma was awoken in the middle of the night by his cell phone ringing. He headed to the spot designated in the email.

It was an iron bridge in District 7.

When Kamijou arrived, he found the sender of the email waiting.

“Misaka…?”

“You lost this,” she said and tossed something toward him.

Kamijou grabbed it in one hand and then realized that it was a frog strap. It was the one Kamijou had lost when he had sunk into the Arctic Ocean. The string that attached to his cell phone had torn, but it now had a new string of a different color on it.

“Since ours match, don’t go losing it so easily.”

“Sorry.”

After apologizing, Kamijou attached the strap to his cell phone once more.

When Mikoto saw that, she smiled slightly.

Her expression seemed to say that something had finally been returned to normal.

“With you, I know it’s hopeless to expect you to just stay in one place…but are you going somewhere by any chance?”

“Seems that way.” Kamijou sighed. “To be honest, even though I may look like I know what’s going on, I really don’t have much of an idea what’s going to happen this time. All I know about the group causing it is their name. But the effects have reached Academy City. This time I am not getting dragged into it in the process of Academy City being targeted. Academy City is getting dragged into this in the process of me being targeted. …So I can’t just ignore this.”

“Well, I know you aren’t the kind of person that would listen to me if I tried, so I won’t stop you.”

It seemed Mikoto’s only business with him had been the strap.

Kamijou put his cell phone back in his pocket.

The action seemed to be saying that he was cutting their connection now that they had nothing more to talk about.

“Well, see you around,” Kamijou said.

He turned his back on Mikoto.

He started away from the iron bridge.

He started away from the scientific knowledge arranged by Academy City and into the other side of that territory.

Mikoto grabbed that boy’s hand.

She made certain of that boy who was about to leave her.

Mikoto's words reached Kamijou's ears as his movement was stopped.

"But this time, you aren't alone."

And…

As those boys were preparing themselves to head forward, Birdway was also silently heading out.

She followed the path back to a high class hotel in District 3 of Academy City.

She was walking rather than using a vehicle and she was checking with her subordinate men wearing black on the many matters they had been contacted about. The topic was mainly about the giant golden arms that had appeared around the world at the end of World War III and the disposal of the objects made of the same material that had appeared when the golden arms had exploded. Also under discussion was the progress of the recovery and return of the parts of churches and cathedrals from across the world that had been used to construct the Star of Bethlehem, the giant fortress that could be said to be the true symbol of World War III.

However, Birdway and her men were not carrying out those things. They were mainly intercepting information on the work being carried out by religious organizations larger than themselves such as the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Church.

After their discussion was more or less over, Birdway suddenly spoke.

“…It must be difficult for you, Aleister.”

She was not speaking to the men surrounding her. She was only speaking to herself. However, Birdway knew. She did not understand the detailed

principles behind it, but she knew that a certain man could hear what she said there.

“I had guessed it from that disturbance with the Freshmen, but the incident with Radiosonde Castle clinches it. And I’m sure Gremlin has come to the same conclusion. …*You cannot move freely*. I do not think the actions of those Freshmen are in line with your objectives and I haven’t overlooked the fact that you did not stop them. And there was no reason to allow Radiosonde Castle to pass over Academy City.”

Leivinia Birdway investigated leaders and charismatic people both ancient and recent, both East and West and she would use that information to efficiently grasp the core of society.

She had pursued a certain person as a sample for that research.

That person was a magician called Aleister Crowley.

“So the errors in your plan have exceeded the acceptable range, have they?” she said. “I do not know the details of what you are currently trying to do…but I have thoroughly studied what you were trying to do back in the 1900s before you were considered dead. From that viewpoint, this situation must be well removed from your objective. Am I wrong?”

Of course, she received no response as she spoke to herself.

Regardless, Birdway continued.

“During World War III and in your contact with Fiamma of the Right, a major deviation occurred in your plan centered on Kamijou Touma. You are trying to correct that, but you do not know in what direction to apply power in order to bring things back to normal. Unless you can unravel all the conditions that are so complexly intertwined, you cannot take any real action. That is why you did not drag Kamijou out of the Arctic Ocean despite knowing he was sinking into it, and that is why you took no action to secure him despite knowing that he had returned to Academy City.”

Kamijou Touma, Accelerator, and Hamazura Shiage.

They all had their social lives and their separate relationships with others, so it would not have been hard to find someone who could easily be used as a hostage for any one of them. And of those three, Kamijou had the widest group of people he knew and his personality made him very easy to manipulate through the use of a hostage.

And yet Aleister had not done so.

No.

He had not been able to do so.

Technically, he could have done it had he tried, but the magician himself could no longer calculate how much of an effect such a simple action would have on his plan.

"Osiris and Horus. Abandoning the old world bound by the rule of Christianity and the awakening of a new world filled with new laws and freedom. That was your theory, was it not? …Well, I have a feeling there is more to that than simple logic. I have a feeling *your history that let you see the ugly side of the believers of a certain strict Christian denomination and of the modern magical society that claims to have abandoned worldly desires* had something to do with it." While she stared at the night scenery that shined even more brightly than the stars in the sky, a malicious smile appeared on Birdway's face.

"…That's right, Aleister. During World War III, the 'old' rules were removed from this world. And that includes the ones you controlled. The second death. Kamijou Touma's error. Uncontrollable expectations of what will occur in the future. Doesn't the world just seem like so much fun today? You should take satisfaction in this, too. Take satisfaction in this confusion where people move around freely and you therefore cannot be sure where things are headed."

A dry sound rang out.

Right next to Birdway's cheek, two or three blonde hairs were unnaturally severed.

Seeing those pieces of gold floating in the wind, the men surrounding her finally started to go on the alert, but Birdway stopped them with a movement of one hand.

That had been a greeting from Aleister.

Because he used cutting edge science to such a great extent, Birdway did not understand what exactly had happened, but even so, her smile did not disappear.

It was not an issue of the detailed principles used.

She had been given an answer at a much more fundamental level.

"…There was no real reason that strike had to be only a warning," said Birdway without changing her manner of speaking and while still smiling. "I can see your panic in the fact that you did not simply take off my head, Aleister."

Afterword

Umm, to those who started buying with the very first Index novel, to those who started buying with New Testament, to those who bought all of the volumes at once, to those who bought both the New Testament volumes at once, and to everyone who bought this new novel in any of the various paths there: hello.

This is Kamachi Kazuma.

This is the second volume of New Testament. This time, the contents include a bit of a rethinking of magic which is one of the roots on which the setting is based. Also, the view of who 'they' are has been made a little more clear and the meaning of Kamijou Touma's second death has been referenced just a bit…In both cases, I feel it is kind of like dragging something from behind the scenes out to the forefront.

One of the themes is in the word "radiosonde", but that just refers to a disposable weather balloon. Given that, is it a little easier to understand what 'they' did this time?

A lot of people may be realizing that the power balance is crumbling both on an individual level and on an organization level. At first glance, Aleister's interference seems to be hindering the protagonists, but there are also problems that occur when it is no longer there. In a way, the construct of the children fighting while being protected by the power of the adults has been destroyed and now they must stand up for themselves in a world where they will receive no assistance. …When I put it that way, it kind of makes it sound like the second death was him freeing himself from the stairway that is the process of a boy's growth. Of course, that is the incorrect route, but it may be fun to enjoy that as a parallel explanation.

I had the Five Over last time and, by pure coincidence, something related to Mjölnir this time. I can almost see Biri Biri-san looking worried. But just like the science side's Pyrokinesis and the magic side's flame swords are two separate things, I felt that it would not be surprising if the magic side had its own person with a representative electrical attack method. In fact, I felt it would be strange if it didn't, so I made one. Having a large scale but being difficult to use corresponds more to Mugino than to Mikoto, though.

I give my thanks to my illustrator, Haimura-san, and to my editor, Miki-san.

It's probably because I wanted to have a bustling atmosphere in this one, but so many characters made an appearance. It must have been difficult to decide which scenes to cut out. I am truly thankful.

And I give my thanks to all the readers. I was trying to make this one overall more lighthearted by putting in so much comedy, but I think the basic setting behind the scenes actually made it a rather bitter story. This was yet another story that would have been difficult to construct in a debut volume. I am thankful that I have been allowed to just do what I want.

It is time to close the pages for now while praying that the pages of the next book will be opened.

And I lay my pen down for now.

Mikoto is finally joining the fight!! …Although it's because I haven't put her in the fight up until now.

-Kamachi Kazuma

Notes

1. Jump up↥ A slang term for rice
2. Jump up↥ A sumo wrestling term.
3. Jump up↥ An old term for the early Portuguese Christian missionaries to Japan.

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